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BAY OF PIGS AND CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS:
PRESIDENTIAL DECISION-MAKING AND ITS EFFECT
ON MILITARY EMPLOYMENT DURING THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

MANUEL E. FALCON, LCDR, USN
B.S., United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, 1981

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
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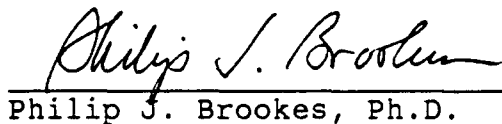
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ABSTRACT

BAY OF PIGS AND CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS: PRESIDENTIAL DECISION-MAKING AND ITS EFFECT ON MILITARY EMPLOYMENT DURING THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION by LCDR Manuel E. Falcon, USN, 105 pages.

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The study focuses on Kennedy's personality and Cold War political realities to arrive at an understanding of the decision-making mindset of the era. From this point of reference, the measure of effectiveness of Kennedy's "flexible response" strategy is validated and his employment of the military can be judged a qualified success.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Kennedy Presidency, perhaps more than any other administration, was inextricably defined by the Cold War. It can be convincingly argued that President John F. Kennedy's ascendancy to the White House was due in large part to his ardent belief in the containment of Communism and anti-Soviet rhetoric. While the Cuban Missile Crisis can be rightfully regarded as the crowning achievement of his foreign policy legacy, it was the Bay of Pigs that shaped international events throughout Kennedy's short tenure, and accelerated the process which resulted in the confrontation with the Soviet Union over the small island nation of Cuba.

A constant throughout Kennedy's years in the White House was his use of the military as America's principal instrument in the conduct of foreign policy. Decisions to deploy the military were based on a myriad of complex issues which generally resulted in poorly articulated military objectives and an increasingly strained relationship between Kennedy and the military. Nevertheless, the military remained Kennedy's instrument of choice and when tasked, the military was able to effectively define its role and execute

the President's foreign policy initiatives. This study explores the origins of Kennedy's decisions and the resultant military employment in support of his policies.

Kennedy Doctrine

President John F. Kennedy's 1960 campaign for the Oval Office was highlighted by an aggressive assault on the incumbent Republican administration's policy toward the Soviet Union. During the campaign, Senator Kennedy made repeated claims that under the stewardship of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the United States had fallen behind the Soviet Union in technology (the Soviets had launched the spacecraft Sputnik in October 1957), in economic growth and, most alarmingly, had allowed the creation of a perceived missile gap substantially in the Soviet's favor. Closer to home, Kennedy suggested that Eisenhower's policies allowed the Soviets to gain a foothold in the Caribbean.¹

Kennedy's campaign promise of a more active role in Cuba and not so subtle hints at the elimination of the Cuban leader Fidel Castro foreshadowed the major crises of his administration.

The origin of the Kennedy doctrine can be traced as far back as March 12, 1947, when Representative Kennedy was in attendance as President Harry S. Truman addressed a joint session of Congress. In a barely veiled attempt to scare the American public and obtain 400 million dollars from Congress for his programs, President Truman provided what

would be the definitive role of American foreign policy for years to come. As the acknowledged leader of the free world, the President argued, the United States had the inherent responsibility to contain the expansionist Soviet Union. The resultant policy of containment was to become the Truman Doctrine.² Putting this doctrine into practice, the United States devised the Marshall Plan in the Fall of 1947, and in 1948 responded to the Soviet blockade of Berlin with the Berlin Airlift.

The Eisenhower doctrine, authored principally by his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, was one of massive retaliation. Given that the United States possessed a nuclear monopoly, this theory was justified in economic terms. It was more cost effective to place a greater reliance on deterrent nuclear power than to maintain a large conventional force. The message to the Soviets was clear: the threat of nuclear retaliation was the American strategy to counter any expansionist aims they might harbor.³ In realistic terms, Eisenhower viewed the maintenance of a nuclear arsenal as cheaper than becoming involved in a protracted conflict as his predecessor had done in North Korea.

As Eisenhower's foreign policy evolved, two key concepts emerged: (1) the domino theory and (2) an increasing use of covert activities as a foreign policy tool. The domino theory focused on events unfolding in

Southeast Asia. The obvious implication was that the United States had to stop Communist expansion into Vietnam. The means by which this strategy was carried out was in the form of government aid and military advisors, some covert.

Eisenhower viewed covert operations as a convenient means by which to disguise failures and capitalize on successes.⁴

Out of Eisenhower's fondness for covert operations grew the hugely successful Guatemala plan, a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) conceived operation which resulted in a bloodless coup. Suitably emboldened, the CIA set about crafting plans (based on the "Guatemala model") for the overthrow of the Cuban government.⁵ As his foreign policy decision-making strategies developed, President Kennedy would very closely adopt both Eisenhower's concept of the domino theory to justify his own aggressive campaign against communist expansion, and also Eisenhower's propensity for covert operations.

Maintaining the momentum that carried him into office, President Kennedy immediately introduced a strategic policy that was markedly different than President Eisenhower's. Recognizing the increased Soviet nuclear capability and abiding by his own belief that the military, much like diplomacy, was a critical instrument of foreign policy, Kennedy's strategy became one of "flexible response" rather than massive retaliation. President Kennedy wanted alternatives to assured destruction, and the forces

available to present a credible deterrence across the entire spectrum of conflict.⁶ The result was the United States' largest ever peacetime military buildup to date, and the acceleration of an already prodigious arms race with the Soviet Union.

The centerpiece of Kennedy's new strategy was the buildup of conventional forces and an emphasis on guerrilla warfare, pro-insurgency and counterinsurgency operations. With an increase in the defense budget of 526 million dollars, Kennedy sought to increase the capabilities of his conventional forces. His plans to do so included buying additional sealift and airlift assets, developing a ship modernization program, and significantly increasing conventional war materiel stocks such as ammunition, electronic equipment and helicopters.⁷

Turning his attention to Moscow, and in keeping with his "flexible response" strategy, the modernization of United States nuclear forces was no less a priority for President Kennedy. He requested an additional 366 million dollars to increase the U.S. inventory of Minuteman Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM) and Polaris Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBM) by two-thirds while improving their survivability, accuracy, range, and reliability.⁸ Kennedy's emphasis was on the maintenance of a force capable of delivering a decisive retaliatory strike in response to a Soviet first strike.

In developing his foreign policy doctrine, President Kennedy clearly recognized the deterrent value of maintaining balanced military capabilities. He reasoned that a strong conventional force was not in itself the ultimate deterrent. It could, however, be used in crisis escalation to make the nuclear deterrent a more viable one. The nuclear option would not represent the first, and sometimes only, option as had been the case in the previous administration.

In adopting the "domino theory," and Eisenhower's penchant for covert operations, Kennedy inherited considerable foreign policy baggage from the outgoing administration. In an Oval Office meeting just prior to the 1961 inauguration, Eisenhower laid out in plain terms for Kennedy what he felt should be the incoming President's top foreign policy priority: the containment of Communist expansionism--specifically, in Laos, which would give the Soviets a base from which to expand into Southeast Asia and into the western Pacific; and, more importantly, in Cuba, located a mere ninety miles off the Florida coast. Eisenhower intimated that it was the President's responsibility to overthrow Fidel Castro by whatever means necessary.⁹ The foundation was being laid for critical decisions which would be made a few short months into Kennedy's Presidency.

Within days of assuming the White House, President Kennedy's newly appointed Defense Secretary, Robert S. McNamara, admitted in a Pentagon press conference that no "missile gap" existed with the Soviet Union. Contradicting one of Kennedy's principal campaign themes, the new President's credibility was immediately brought into question. To complicate matters further, Cuba was publicly flaunting its developing relationship with the Soviet Union and Fidel Castro was practically daring anyone to invade. His credibility already shaken, Kennedy was now facing constituents to whom he had pledged during his campaign to be tough on Castro.¹⁰ While campaigning, Kennedy went so far as to proclaim that some sort of operation should be undertaken to cause the removal of Castro. He did so unaware that Eisenhower had initiated the planning for just such an operation.¹¹ Kennedy believed he had no choice. He felt he had to act to regain the credibility of his fledgling presidency and make good on campaign promises. Thus the seeds were sown for the first test of the Kennedy doctrine, a doctrine that by its nature demanded a proactive course of action.

While the United States was developing a clear nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union, President Kennedy's relationship with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev was becoming increasingly antagonistic. Kennedy's strategic doctrine was inconspicuously evolving into one in which a

nuclear first strike was not categorically rejected. In late March 1962, the Kennedy doctrine suggested that although it was not the policy of the United States to strike first, "Khrushchev must not be certain that, where its vital interests are threatened, the United States will never strike first."¹² It was against this backdrop of increasing international tension and the demonstrated American willingness to support military activities overseas (as in the Bay of Pigs and in Southeast Asia) that events were rapidly snowballing toward the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Evolution of the Role of the Military

From the outset, President Kennedy's pragmatic view of the interdependence between the military and diplomacy in foreign affairs served as the driving force behind the use of arms as the genesis for his "flexible response" strategy. Despite an increased role for the military, Kennedy tempered what might have appeared to be a step toward a foreign policy dominated by options conceived by the military, by ensuring a clearer civilian control of the military and military policy formulation. With clear guidance from Kennedy, it was left to Defense Secretary McNamara to formulate the strategic doctrine from which the military's role in foreign policy would be more precisely defined during his administration.¹³

Despite attempts to make it appear otherwise, evidence suggests Kennedy was not always willing to allow

diplomacy to run its course before committing the military. His administration employed the military as an instrument of foreign policy at a greater rate than any other postwar President: 39 times (13 per year), compared to 35 (4 per year) for Truman, and 57 for Eisenhower (7 per year). During the Kennedy Presidency, defense expenditures increased by 13 percent over the Eisenhower Administration. The net result of Kennedy's "flexible response" strategy was to make the military an attractive option in most situations.¹⁴

In contrast to his belief in the use of military power, Kennedy's perception of the military as an organization when he entered the White House was one of contempt. This feeling was shaped by both his association with the "New Frontiersman," and his own military experience during World War II. The "New Frontier" was a phrase coined by Kennedy during his nomination acceptance speech which came to define the legion of advisors he brought with him to Washington. They were young by Washington standards, most had military experience in World War II, and as a group, had an almost universal contempt for a military they perceived to be an entrenched bureaucratic institution. They looked upon the military as an inflexible bureaucracy where one had to endure great pains to get anything accomplished. Using World War II as the source of their experience, they professed to have a complete understanding of national goals

and the military's role in the attainment of those goals. In their minds, they thus had only marginal use for the advice of senior military officers.¹⁵

Kennedy's own World War II experience was short, but nevertheless, eventful. The experience revealed his early, less than favorable impression of the military hierarchy. In letters home while assigned to a Motor Torpedo Boat (MTB) squadron, and later while hospitalized by the Navy, Kennedy wrote of his disgust for military inefficiency and mistrust of senior officers. This perception, fueled by his contemporaries, made him skeptical of the value of advice he would receive from his Joint Chiefs of Staff.¹⁶

His early dealings with the military did little to engender the trust or mutual respect that would have given Kennedy reason to include senior military officers in his inner circle of advisors. Foreign policy and military strategy formulation was done almost exclusively with his civilian advisors. Additionally, in an attempt to minimize damage in United States/Soviet relations after the false missile gap was revealed by his Defense Secretary, Kennedy ordered the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Arleigh Burke, to end the anti-Soviet rhetoric he was well known for on the lecture circuit. This last fact, referred to by some Republicans on Capitol Hill as "gag rule diplomacy," was leaked to the press, further straining an already tenuous relationship between Kennedy and the military.¹⁷ This is

the environment in which the Bay of Pigs operation was undertaken.

The Bay of Pigs operation was exclusively a CIA conceived plan. Yet, as with most major disasters, there was sufficient blame to share with any organization remotely associated with its implementation. Some of the blame, whether justified or not, was directed at the military. President Kennedy was seemingly convinced that the early misgivings he had concerning the military establishment, particularly the quality of advice he would receive from its senior leadership, were well founded. Although he would continue to use the military as his primary foreign policy tool, the principal deliberations which would ultimately lead to their deployment would be done with little input from the uniformed services.

To investigate the reasons for failure at the Bay of Pigs, President Kennedy asked General Maxwell D. Taylor, former Army Chief of Staff, to come out of retirement to chair the Cuba Study Group. In a letter to Taylor which set forth the charter of the Study Group, Kennedy made only passing mention of the Bay of Pigs. His preoccupation was with improving the military's capability to conduct guerrilla, anti-guerrilla and paramilitary activities.¹⁸ It is these types of activities that would define the military's predominant role under Kennedy during the period leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Bitterly disappointed with the advice he received from the military during the Bay of Pigs, President Kennedy pursued one of General Taylor's recommendations by meeting with his Joint Chiefs to define their roles further. As his principal military advisors, they were responsible for providing the President with complete and unfiltered advice. Additionally, their advice should not be purely military but also should consider political, economic and psychological factors. In short, the military should be made to feel a certain sense of responsibility for the outcome of the Cold War.¹⁹ Even as Kennedy's relationship with the military matured, the credibility he would attach to their advice would be prejudiced by the Bay of Pigs.

Based on General Taylor's work with the Cuba Study Group, coupled with the fact he had authored a book, The Uncertain Trumpet, which outlined what the General considered inadequacies with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Kennedy offered Taylor a position in his administration. He was assigned the newly created position of Military Representative of the President. His role would be to serve as an advisor on military matters but with no command authority.²⁰ This position allowed a military man into Kennedy's inner circle of trusted advisors, but did nothing to solidify the President's relationship with the remainder of the military hierarchy, or further define their roles.

The months between the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis saw Kennedy turn his attention primarily to Southeast Asia where again his principal instrument was the military. In a fate that befell more than one administration, the role of the military in Vietnam was never clearly defined, and, therefore, there was nothing tangible with which to measure the successes or failures of American military employment in the region. President Kennedy never clearly articulated his administration's political objectives in South Vietnam. With the Bay of Pigs serving as his introduction to foreign policy decision-making, Kennedy was clearly reluctant to pursue any course of action which would make him appear weak. Nothing came out of Kennedy's Vietnam experience which would appreciably change the President's perception of the military.

When the post of Supreme Allied Commander of NATO became vacant, President Kennedy offered the job to General Taylor. He declined, stating that he had long neglected responsibilities at home due to his numerous overseas assignments and desired to remain stateside. The President then nominated the current Chairman, General Lyman Lemnitzer, to the NATO post, opening the way for General Taylor's eventual nomination to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The President was finally able to begin shaping the Joint Chiefs with men of his own choosing.²¹ The value of General Taylor's return to uniform became evident as the

events of the Cuban Missile Crisis unfolded. During Executive Committee (EXCOMM) meetings throughout the Missile Crisis, General Taylor was typically the only military representative present. The role of the military during the Missile Crisis, unlike the Bay of Pigs, would be clearly defined.

Research Design

Kennedy Decision-Making

The basis for this study is a historical review of events which caused decisions to be made within the Kennedy White House which ultimately resulted in the deployment of the military in the conduct of foreign policy.

Specifically, the events which are covered are the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The primary avenue of research will focus on how President Kennedy arrived at his decisions, and, once doing so, how effectively he employed the military in pursuit of his policies.

The first chapter has provided a background study on what has been loosely defined by some historians as the Kennedy Doctrine. Kennedy's reasoning for his pursuit of a "flexible response" strategy and the evolution of the military's role in the execution of his strategy are included in the chapter.

Chapter Two examines the Bay of Pigs and the implications that the operation had on Kennedy's relationship with the military. Military successes and

failures, as the operation unfolded, are also examined. Insomuch as the Bay of Pigs invasion plan was conceived during the Eisenhower Administration, a detailed description of the plans' evolution prior to Kennedy's ascendancy to the Presidency is included. This is done to provide background on the multitude of factors which will eventually answer the question which concludes the chapter: Why the Bay of Pigs?

Chapter Three describes the transition period between the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis with particular focus on how the resultant Kennedy decision-making apparatus affected the military. Political and diplomatic fallout from the Bay of Pigs is also included to illustrate the relationship between the two events. Disregarding the eventual outcome of the Cuban Missile Crisis, an analysis of the military role during the crisis concludes the chapter. This analysis is done in the context of Kennedy's role in managing the crisis and military actions taken short of war. Recent Soviet revelations of actual troop strengths on the island provide a good barometer for United States military preparations.

The final chapter provides the analysis and conclusion. Extensive research has been done which defines Kennedy's decision-making style during the Cuban Missile Crisis in one of several decision-making models. While these provided useful background on the various motivators for decision-makers, they have, as a whole, been

exhaustively researched and critiqued, put too little focus on the military implications of decisions, and almost entirely disregarded the Bay of Pigs. Therefore, the analysis in this study is weighted toward pragmatic, event oriented decision-making which focuses on the personality traits of the decision-maker.

The analysis is also more in keeping with recently published accounts of President Kennedy which tend to portray a generally less favorable impression of his performance than was previously thought to be the case. This was particularly prevalent during the many crises of his Administration. This was not done with malice of forethought; however, in researching Kennedy's relationship with the military, and the manner in which he conducted himself during military crises, numerous shortcomings in his performance become evident. This, of course, must be tempered by the ultimate success of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Cold War mindset which so dominated the era.

Literature Review

As anticipated, there exists a wealth of information on the Cuban Missile Crisis. There is somewhat less on the Bay of Pigs; however, it is sufficient for the study of Kennedy decision-making as it relates to the employment of the military. The primary source materials have largely been works by individuals who were in the Kennedy Administration. These include Raymond L. Garthoff's

Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis, Robert F. Kennedy's Thirteen Days, Arthur M. Schlesinger's A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House, Theodore C. Sorensen's Kennedy, and General Maxwell D. Taylor's Swords and Plowshares. The later three books cover both events. With the exception of Garthoff (whose book was revised in 1989 to include Soviet and Cuban sources), these books were written by Kennedy intimates and are almost exclusively laudatory in their examination of President Kennedy and his decisions.

Recent authors have been much more critical of Kennedy and provide a nice counter-balance to the writings listed above. These include Michael R. Beschloss's The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev 1960-1963, Robert Smith Thompson's The Missiles of October: The Declassified Story of John F. Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Thomas G. Paterson's Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963.

In addition to some of the books listed above, the primary source for the Bay of Pigs has been Peter Wyden's Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story.

Three books provide a good foundation for the primary focus of the research design: Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis by Graham T. Allison; Foreign Policy Crisis: Appearance and Reality in Decision-Making by Thomas Harper and; Thinking In Time: The Uses of

History for Decision Makers by Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May.

Numerous additional books, government documents, transcripts of meetings, magazine and newspaper articles, previous research papers and television documentaries were used to round out the primary and secondary source material.

CHAPTER 2

BAY OF PIGS

Prelude to Disaster

In 1961, world politics were dominated by the cold war. The Soviet Union was making inroads in Africa, Communist insurgencies were poised to take over in Laos and establish a stronghold in Southeast Asia, and in the Western Hemisphere, Fidel Castro's Cuban revolution was drifting undeniably to the left. Most Americans felt the formation of a Communist state in the Caribbean created an unacceptable security threat to the United States. Overwhelming popular opinion favored some sort of response from the United States Government.¹

United States options in Cuba were becoming increasingly limited as anti-Americanism was taking hold as the central theme of Castro's social revolution. As early as March 1959, there were indications from within the Castro Government that the Cuban revolution was being driven toward Communism in both structure and foreign relations. Additionally, it appeared that Cuba was purposely being portrayed as an enemy of the United States.² Publicly, Castro's anti-American rhetoric was based on a Latin, not Communist, view of the United States' perceived dominance in

the region. Castro was a charismatic and astute politician who was exceptionally popular among most working-class Latin Americans. He was able to convince large followings that any link between his revolution and Communism was more of the usual Washington propaganda of associating all Latin reformers with Communists.³

Despite what appeared to be open hostility toward the United States and an attempt at provocation by Cuba, the Eisenhower administration chose to pursue a course of moderation in public. In January 1960, the Eisenhower White House issued a statement detailing a policy it had no intention of following. Its key points were as follows: (1) the United States's reiteration of its commitment to its treaty obligations of non-intervention; (2) that, although it was recognized that Cuban territory had been used as a point of departure to launch illegal actions in other countries, it would not allow the use of United States territories to be used as staging grounds for any actions against Cuba; (3) expressed concern at the unsubstantiated accusations being directed at the United States by Cuban authorities; (4) recognized Cuba's sovereign right under international law to pursue its own domestic reforms; and (5) a declaration that the United States had a right to defend the rights of its citizens in Cuba after they had "exhausted their remedies under Cuban law."⁴ Privately, President Eisenhower and his advisors were discussing a wide

range of options to dispose of Castro. In one White House meeting, a clearly frustrated Eisenhower stated that "Castro begins to look like a madman," and intimated that he was willing to impose a unilateral blockade on Cuba absent cooperation from the Organization of American States (OAS).⁵

The guise under which Eisenhower's public policy was being undertaken lasted but a few weeks. Eisenhower wanted to finish his Presidency in a peaceful atmosphere; however, that desire was rapidly being overcome by events. The election year in the United States resulted in the electorate's increasing focus on Cuba and Communist expansion. In February, Soviet Deputy Premier Anastas Mikoyan paid a state visit to Havana. Provoking the United States further, Castro alleged that Americans were responsible for an explosion on a French munitions ship anchored in Havana harbor which resulted in the loss of life.⁶

Increased Soviet intervention in Cuba further inflamed the hostilities. In May 1960, Khrushchev insinuated that the "Monroe Doctrine 'has died a natural death' and should be interred as a stinking corpse," while also announcing that any "American aggression" against Cuba would lead to a response from the Soviet Union.⁷ Any pretense of a peaceful coexistence between Castro and the United States was completely put to rest. The formulation

and eventual implementation of a covert operation to overthrow Castro was given new life.

By this time, President Eisenhower had already assigned the task of solving the "Cuban problem" to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). On 17 March 1960, Eisenhower authorized the Director of the CIA, Allen W. Dulles, to implement a program to create, train, and equip a guerrilla force to overthrow the government of Fidel Castro.⁸ The CIA program had four parts: (1) "creation of a 'responsible and unified' Cuban government in exile;" (2) "a powerful propaganda offensive;" (3) "a covert intelligence and action organization in Cuba that would be responsive to the government in exile;" and (4) "a paramilitary force outside of Cuba for future guerilla action."⁹ Eisenhower was particularly fond of the first part of the program; indicating a desire to find a "Cuban leader living in exile" who could direct the activities of the paramilitary forces, and eventually "form a government that the United States could recognize."¹⁰ The decision to use the CIA as the lead agency in addressing potential foreign policy initiatives was in keeping with the administration's propensity toward low cost, covert diplomatic efforts.

Richard M. Bissell, Jr., the CIA's deputy director for plans, was placed in charge of the Cuba operation and was the principal author of the four point program. He had

been a key contributor to the CIA's successful 1954 coup in Guatemala,¹¹ and had been in charge of the program that resulted in the production of the famous U-2 photographic-reconnaissance spy plane.¹² Armed with these credentials, the Cuba "program" gained instant credibility among Eisenhower advisors.

The top-secret plan, officially titled, "A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime," also called for "a small air supply capability under deep cover as a commercial operation in another country." The official estimate was that the entire operation would be functional in six to eight months.¹³ Further fueling the plan's momentum were members of the National Security Council (NSC) who were becoming increasingly outspoken in their desire to see the Castro government replaced. One individual who was particularly interested in the success of the plan was the 1960 Republican Presidential candidate, and then-Vice President, Richard M. Nixon.¹⁴ With the CIA given such a free reign and broad mandate, the planning and execution of what was to become the Bay of Pigs was in full swing.

From the outset, President Eisenhower's predisposition against the use of overt military force as an option in securing political objectives provided the impetus for a military plan that ultimately had little Pentagon input. To ensure a suitable probability for the success of such a plan, the institutional momentum that was generated

by an agency (CIA) operating in a vacuum would require close scrutiny and an unambiguous desired end state articulated by the ultimate decision-maker. In the waning days of his Presidency, Eisenhower sensed no urgency to provide either. Eisenhower's decision was not a political one, but one balanced by his seemingly genuine desire to provide his successor with a workable option for resolving the Cuba dilemma without committing American troops or adversely affecting world opinion. The political consequences were an issue for Kennedy to resolve.

Kennedy Transition

President-elect Kennedy's first official exposure to the CIA's invasion plan was during Oval Office pre-inaugural talks with President Eisenhower in December 1960. His opponent in the election, Vice President Nixon, claimed Kennedy was aware of the plan as early as July of that year. Some recent writings suggest that Kennedy may have known as early as Nixon indicated;¹⁵ however, no evidence exists to verify this.¹⁶ To Nixon, the facts regarding what Kennedy may have known about the plan, and at what point he became aware of its existence, were central to the campaign.

To counter a Nixon charge during the campaign that Kennedy was soft on communism, Kennedy speech writer, Richard Goodwin, released a statement to the press (which he attributed to Kennedy) which read in part: "We must attempt to strengthen the non-Batista democratic anti-Castro forces

in exile, and in Cuba itself, who offer eventual hope of overthrowing Castro. Thus far these fighters for freedom have had virtually no support from our government."¹⁷

Kennedy, having already gone to bed for the evening, had not seen the statement before it was released. He did not retract it, however, because it was in keeping with the exchange he had with Nixon the previous day. When Nixon called for a "quarantine" of Cuba, Kennedy countered that Nixon's proposal was "too little, too late," and (perhaps oblivious that such a plan existed) called for direct intervention in Cuba.¹⁸

Nixon was furious. He fully suspected that Kennedy was aware of the CIA invasion plans and felt his reckless comments were "jeopardizing the security of the United States foreign policy operation."¹⁹ Kennedy continued his assault when, during a televised debate, he criticized the Republican administration for allowing communism to establish a foothold "only ninety miles off the coast of the United States." Fearing that any comments he might make could endanger the planned operation, Nixon could only retort that Kennedy was being overly reckless in his foreign policy views. In a comment that was to prove prophetic, Nixon further stated, that backing the "freedom fighters" would have the United States "condemned in the United Nations," and would amount to "an open invitation for Mr. Khrushchev...to come into Latin America."²⁰ The ninety

miles comment, and Nixon's seemingly timid response captured the imagination of the voters. Kennedy concluded that, "if elected, he would do something about it, not just stand still."²¹ Kennedy was seemingly convincing himself that Cuba required immediate action upon his inauguration. Co-existence and the status quo were not part of his campaign lexicon.

It is highly speculative to suggest that the revelation of the fact that Kennedy may have been aware of plans for an invasion of Cuba--and Nixon's subsequent campaign performance--were significant contributors to the outcome of the election. Nevertheless, the event served to further politicize the deliberations which eventually resulted in the decision by Kennedy to undertake the Bay of Pigs operation.

After the campaign rhetoric subsided with Kennedy's election, President Eisenhower had hoped the last ten weeks of his Administration would see him in a caretaker role. He proposed no new initiatives, but worked to maintain as many options open as possible so as not to tie the hands of the incoming president.²² He developed a somewhat indifferent attitude toward the invasion option of the CIA plan,²³ and assured President-elect Kennedy that he had no wish of "turning over the government in the midst of a developing emergency."²⁴ Additionally, President Eisenhower was getting a mixed endorsement of the plan from the military.

They had not been involved in the planning, knew little of it, and therefore seemed to be distancing themselves from its execution. They were in agreement with former General Eisenhower's military philosophy "that one did not ever use military power unless you were prepared to use it to the full extent necessary to achieve whatever the objective was that you started for."²⁵

President Eisenhower's desire for a peaceful transition ended on 2 January 1961, when Castro, accusing American Embassy staff members of being spies, ordered eighty percent of them to leave the country within twenty-four hours.²⁶ Not consulting President-elect Kennedy, Eisenhower severed diplomatic relations with Cuba. This well-publicized event added to the already growing public demand for action which Kennedy helped create during his campaign for the presidency.²⁷ In private, Eisenhower directed Bissell and the CIA to increase the size of the refugee force and step up preparations. However, the outgoing President was resigned to "turn over our responsibility on the twentieth," while declaring, "our successors should continue to improve and intensify the training and undertake planning when the Cubans are themselves properly organized."²⁸

By the time Kennedy entered office, the tentative plans of ten months prior had developed into full-blown invasion preparations. Under the energetic CIA leadership

of Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell the plan had taken on "impressive proportions," and seemed to have developed its "own self-contained dynamics."²⁹ Not only had Kennedy inherited the "Cuba problem," he had a covert army at his disposal should he choose to employ it. With his action-oriented campaigning and anti-communist posturing, Kennedy seemed to reason that some course of action was required. He made no effort to dissuade the continuing preparations of the CIA plan and, in fact, seemed intrigued by its continued progress.

Kennedy's Plan

On November 18, 1960, CIA Director, Allen Dulles and his deputy, Richard Bissell gave President-elect Kennedy his first full intelligence briefing. Bissell provided the details of the ongoing invasion preparations. Kennedy seemed surprised only by the size of the operation; he gave no indication that he did not fully endorse the plan. During the course of the briefing, Bissell and Dulles reminded Kennedy that "Soviet military aid was now flowing into Cuba: the longer an invasion was postponed, the more difficult it would be."³⁰ Kennedy's only perceptible hesitancy was his desire to consider the matter further before committing to it. By his acquiescence he was adopting the plan as his own.

Indeed, it was not until two days later that President Eisenhower was briefed on the true size of the

expanding invasion force and the developing paramilitary concept of the operation. The new plan called for a landing of over 600 men and was to be preceded by air strikes. After the briefing, Dulles was left with the impression that Eisenhower wanted preparations for the operation "expedited."³¹ When Kennedy was briefed by the CIA director about these same specifics on 29 November, he also agreed that Dulles should expedite the project.³²

Riding into the White House on the wave of the Cuba problem, Kennedy could hardly relegate the issue to the back burner. The topic was seemingly brought up at every public appearance. In his first press conference following the inauguration, Kennedy responded to a question about Castro by indicating that at present, the United States had no plans to resume diplomatic relations with Cuba.³³ His State of the Union Message, delivered four days later, made numerous references to the Cold War, and called for a strengthening of the military to support the beginnings of his flexible response strategy. Referring specifically to Cuba, Kennedy commented, "Communist agents seeking to exploit that region's peaceful revolution of hope have established a base on Cuba, only ninety miles from our shores....Communist domination in this hemisphere can never be negotiated."³⁴

To reestablish confidence in his administration after the false "missile gap" was revealed, the new

President felt the need for rapid action. To do nothing would be a sign of weakness, and could potentially harm his credibility abroad. By continuing the strong anti-Communist rhetoric that got him into office, and supporting a stronger defense, Kennedy wanted to make certain that American power was not only sufficient, but was recognized as such around the world.³⁵

A credible conventional military capability able to respond quickly to a limited war scenario, as was potentially developing in the Caribbean, was the type of force Kennedy championed as a candidate and vigorously pursued as he entered the White House. To what degree he was willing to use that force, particularly in a situation that did not necessarily demand American involvement, was a question Kennedy failed to address in his transition to power. The Bay of Pigs would be his first opportunity to test his evolving doctrine.

Kennedy's Decision

On January 22, 1961, Allen Dulles and General Lyman Lemnitzer, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, briefed the leading members of the new administration on the Cuba project. Within a week, President Kennedy presided over his first meeting on the plan in the White House. This meeting was the first time all the members of the Joint Chiefs were officially introduced to the plan. After the meeting, Kennedy directed the Department of Defense to

report on the military concept of the plan, and the State Department, working through the OAS, to prepare diplomatic options for Cuba.³⁶

General Lemnitzer's role in the early meetings may have lent a certain military credibility to the plan that was not justified. The planning had been ongoing for months with little military input. Kennedy's direction to the military at this juncture was significant in that it got the Pentagon's senior leadership officially involved in the operation. The President did not, however, adequately define what the military's role would be, thereby suppressing what should have been a more candid review of the plan by the JCS.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) reported on 3 February with a document entitled, "Military Evaluation of the CIA Paramilitary Plan-Cuba." The JCS rated the plan as having a "fair" chance of military success, but ultimately, the report stated, the overall success of the plan would depend on a considerable uprising from within the island or substantial support from additional forces. The report further stated that due to the complex nature of the operation, "an independent evaluation of the combat effectiveness of the invasion forces and detailed analysis of logistics plans should be made by a team of army [sic], naval [sic] and Air Force officers."³⁷ To maintain

secrecy, Kennedy denied the JCS an opportunity to staff the project further.³⁸

President Kennedy's penchant for extreme secrecy was a trait that would prove common in most foreign policy deliberations which eventually resulted in his decision to deploy the military. To a large and unfortunate degree, it served to insulate him from information which would prove valuable in his decision-making. While national security considerations were the convenient explanation, in the case of the ongoing Cuba invasion preparations, maintaining feasible deniability was the overriding factor. The lack of access to key information served further to hamper military preparations for whatever role the military may be called upon to perform.

After the limited military review of the plan, Richard Bissell presented the JCS position to the President. Clearly biased in favor of a plan in which he had vested so much effort, Bissell's persuasive and energetic briefings had the desired effect. Kennedy Special Assistant and historian, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., wrote of Bissell's briefings: "we all listened transfixed--in this meeting and other meetings which followed--fascinated by the workings of this superbly clear, organized and articulate intelligence, while Bissell, pointer in hand, would explain how the invasion would work or discourse on the relative merits of alternative landing points."³⁹ With only limited and

somewhat muted opposition by the military, the CIA plan was increasingly gaining support within the administration.

When dissent among Kennedy advisors was voiced during the deliberations leading to the final decision, Allen Dulles would join in the effort to relieve the President's fears. In one exchange, Dulles told Kennedy, "Mr. President, I know you're doubtful about this, but I stood at this very desk and said to President Eisenhower about a similar operation in Guatemala, 'I believe it will work.' And I say to you now, Mr. President, that the prospects for this plan are even better than our prospects were in Guatemala."⁴⁰

Ultimately, what may have kept the operation alive was the very reason that would eventually cause its failure: the attempt by the United States Government to maintain deniability throughout the execution of the plan. What would be done with the hundreds of men training in Guatemala for the invasion of Cuba? Disbanding them would undoubtedly expose the CIA operation, revealing how the United States had planned to dispose of Castro, then lost its nerve. The effect, Dulles pointed out, would be to discredit the United States, dishearten Castro opponents, and eventually "produce pro-Castro revolutions all around the Caribbean."⁴¹

Deniability was particularly important to Kennedy for he wanted to dispose of Castro without expending any political capital, particularly overseas. To be cast in the

light of an imperialist Yankee would end any hopes for the "Alliance for Progress" he proposed in his inaugural address. Privately, Kennedy was concerned that if American military force was committed against Cuba, Khrushchev might retaliate with Soviet military force in Berlin. Finally, Kennedy feared the sight of American military power on Cuban soil might result in another Hungary.⁴²

The consensus among Kennedy advisors seemed to be that something had to be done, but it had to be made to appear that the United States was not involved. On 11 March, Bissell presented the CIA's Trinidad plan. The plan called for a combined amphibious/airborne assault at Trinidad supported by tactical airpower. Kennedy opposed the plan as "too spectacular," saying it resembled an amphibious invasion from World War II. He wanted a quiet landing, done preferably at night, with plans drawn up that required no intervention from the United States military. He recognized that the principal stumbling block with maintaining a plan that was deniable would be the tradeoffs between military and political risks. He wanted a plan that would bring the two into better balance.⁴³

CIA planners provided three alternative landing sites. The least objectionable of these was in the Zapata area adjacent to the Bahia de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs). Of the three, the JCS also preferred the Zapata plan due to its available airstrips, and because restricted access to the

area provided a natural defense for the invaders. The JCS's first preference, however, remained the original Trinidad plan. Kennedy agreed to the Bay of Pigs plan but ordered that the "noise level" be further reduced by ensuring that all invasion ships be off-loaded at night. The President withheld formal approval, but told the CIA to continue planning under the assumption that the invasion would be carried out. Additionally, he directed that planning be continued in such a manner that it would allow him to cancel the operation as late as twenty-four hours prior to D-Day.⁴⁴

Contributing to the President's indecisiveness was the growing dissent among his advisors and others from whom he sought counsel. The greatest dissenters were Arkansas Senator J. William Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and special assistant Schlesinger, both of whom provided the President with unsolicited written memoranda outlining their objections to the plan. Fulbright denounced the plan outright, urging a policy of containment. With newspapers increasingly forecasting an invasion, the plan was anything but a secret. He considered it inconceivable that the United States could convince the world of non-complicity in the operation. Even if successful, Fulbright reasoned, "it would be denounced from the Rio Grande to Patagonia as an example of imperialism...

we would have undone the work of thirty years in trying to live down earlier interventions."⁴⁵

Schlesinger's concerns were twofold. He held the same belief that the United States would be unable to dissociate itself from the Cuban invaders. Additionally, he was concerned that little evidence existed to indicate that the invasion would "touch off a mass insurrection" against Castro rather than turn into a protracted civil war. He added that it would be politically difficult not "to send in the Marines," should the rebels call for U.S. armed assistance.⁴⁶ On the point concerning insurrection, CIA intelligence reports continued to sound positive for those in favor of the operation.

As late as 30 March the CIA was painting a favorable picture. The weekly intelligence summary of that day reported an increase in anti-Castro terrorist bombings and other accounts of attempted sabotage. That corroborated an intelligence report that stated, "the shortage of basic food and household items, felt by all levels of society, is causing increasing dissatisfaction...."⁴⁷

With the D-Day of 5 April rapidly approaching, the CIA was anxious for a decision. Allen Dulles described how heavy rains would descend on the Caribbean islands by the end of April, necessarily delaying the invasion for weeks. By then, Dulles reasoned, the Cubans would have even more Soviet weapons at their disposal.⁴⁸ The President left for

Florida to spend the Easter weekend having only made the decision to postpone D-Day to 10 April. The date of the invasion would later be moved once again to 17 April.⁴⁹

When Kennedy returned to Washington on 4 April, his closest advisors expressed amazement at the President's change in attitude about the Cuba operation. McGeorge Bundy, the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, noted a great deal of skepticism in Kennedy about the plan before he flew to Florida. Schlesinger expressed a similar view, indicating the President seemed dubious about the invasion of Cuba before the Easter weekend. Bundy recalled, that upon the President's return, he "really wanted to do this...when he came to the moment of truth--the decision to go or not go--he made up his mind and told us. He didn't ask us."⁵⁰ The pace of meetings amongst Kennedy insiders accelerated, and the CIA continued to press its case against further delays. All indications were that Kennedy was prepared to make a formal decision.

With everything seemingly in place for a Presidential decision, on 7 April the New York Times reported that an invasion of Cuba was imminent. The article, with the accompanying headline, "Invasion Reported Near," reported that invasion preparations were nearly complete. Clearly angered, Kennedy told his press secretary, Pierre Salinger, "Castro doesn't need agents over

here, all he has to do is read our papers. It's all laid out for him."⁵¹

Short of calling off the invasion, Kennedy believed his only recourse was to distance himself from the ongoing preparations, and allay any doubts that the U.S. military was actively involved in operations leading to an invasion. A few short months into his Presidency, Kennedy did not have the decision-making apparatus in place to balance the concern for his public image with the military significance of the decision he was about to make.

On 12 April President Kennedy held a press conference to air these views. In response to the anticipated question about the invasion of Cuba, Kennedy stated:

First, I want to say that there will not be, under any conditions, an intervention in Cuba by the United States Armed Forces. This Government will do everything it possibly can, and I think it can meet its responsibilities to make sure there are no Americans involved in any actions inside Cuba....

The basic issue in Cuba is not one between the United States and Cuba. It is between the Cubans themselves. I intend to see that we adhere to that principle and as I understand it this administration's attitude is so understood and shared by the anti-Castro exiles from Cuba in this country.⁵²

With this pronouncement, Kennedy may have inadvertently made the decision that eventually doomed the invasion. That was the decision not to use American air power. As events eventually unfolded, it became abundantly clear that this was a pledge Kennedy intended to honor.

Fully expecting otherwise, the President's declaration failed to illicit any undo concern from the plan's architects. Planning continued unabated.

The final plans for the invasion were finally solidified. The invasion of 17 April would be proceeded by an air strike on the fifteenth. Under the guise of defecting Cuban pilots, CIA trained B-26 crews were to attack three airfields to neutralize the Cuban Air Force. After an interval of two days to assess the damage, a second strike was to be conducted at dawn on D-Day.

On 14 April, the invasion fleet sailed from Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua.⁵³ That afternoon, Kennedy called Bissell with approval for the air strikes against the three airfields. Bissell had planned to use sixteen aircraft. Kennedy responded, "I don't want it on that scale. I want it minimal."⁵⁴ At 2:28 the next morning, the first of six B-26s was set to take off from its staging base in Nicaragua.⁵⁵

Military Role

The universal consensus points to generally three causes of failure at the Bay of Pigs: (1) faulty CIA planning; (2) President Kennedy's poor decisions before and during the operation; and (3) the limited role of the military in the planning and execution of the invasion. In the end, the operation that concluded in such total failure was a military one that, from its inception, was run almost

exclusively by a civilian agency. The only subject that everyone involved seemed to agree on was the elimination of Castro as the primary goal of the invasion.

Following the Bay of Pigs operation the Cuba Study Group, chaired by General Maxwell Taylor, concluded that four principal issues surfaced during the study: (1) "the inadequacy of the air support of the landing;" (2) "the failure of the Brigade, when defeated on the beaches, to break out into the interior in guerrilla bands;" (3) "the responsibility of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the military deficiencies;" and (4) "the contradictions in the understandings and attitudes of senior officials involved in the operation."⁵⁶ The most controversial of these was the role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the responsibility they had in the success or failure of the operation.

Had the JCS failed the Commander in Chief in their role as military advisors? Collectively, their response to the Study Group was that they had not. They argued that their role in the operation was a supporting one, charged solely with critiquing the CIA plan and providing limited assistance in training and logistic support. They claimed they were required to work under conditions in which even this modest support was difficult. Secrecy kept them from properly staffing any plans and providing detailed options. No records were taken at any meetings nor agendas circulated among the participants to assist in preparations.

Additionally, the plan was revised so often that military planners did not see it in its final form until the day of the invasion.⁵⁷ Each of these arguments have merit; however, the charge the JCS did not answer, and was certainly the perception of the civilian leadership after the fact, was that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had not been forceful enough in expressing their reservations about the plan.

Regarding the assertion that the JCS failed the new President by not rigorously expressing their concerns about the plan, there can be no escaping blame. If the military is to be judged as a contributing partner to the failure of the Bay of Pigs, it was during the planning phase when seemingly glaring shortcomings in the plan were not detailed to the President. For their part, the JCS were made to feel they had a minor role; therefore, their critique of the plan and briefings to the President were narrowly focused to strictly military considerations. Conversely, Kennedy failed to grasp that his decision amounted to the approval of a military operation and allowed political considerations to dominate his thinking.

Despite these institutional perceptions of what the JCS role should have been, and what turned out to be limited participation and severe restrictions on planning, the military hierarchy continued to plan and make preparations for involvement. With the existence of an American naval

base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and the proximity of the United States to a potential Soviet staging base, the strategic implications were obvious. Although the Joint Chiefs had not been officially briefed on the invasion plans until January 1961, contingency planning had been ongoing for some time.

Brigadier General David W. Gray, Chief of the Joint Subsidiary Activities Division of the Joint Chiefs, had been appointed to run a committee to study the various options available to overthrow Castro. This was being done without the knowledge that President Eisenhower had already directed the CIA to undertake a similar study. General Gray's committee produced a report, Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum (JCSM) 44-61, outlining six alternatives in ascending order of military involvement: (1) economic warfare, including sanctions and embargoes, and diplomatic pressure to isolate Cuba in concert with the Organization of American States; (2) naval blockade; (3) infiltration of a guerrilla force with covert U.S. military support; (4) a guerrilla force with overt United States back-up; (5) naval and air warfare with no invasion; and (6) unilateral all-out invasion.⁵⁸

The study concluded that American involvement in any amount less than that recommended in step four would result in failure. The committee further recommended that an inter-agency staff group be formed to review all

alternatives so that the President would have an overall plan from which to make a decision. The Cuba Study group reported, "this recommendation reached the Secretary of Defense but appears to have been lost in the activities arising out of the change in administration."⁵⁹

It was during this early planning process that members of the Joint Chiefs were becoming aware that a CIA operation was being developed. As early as October 1960, General Lemnitzer, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, had heard rumors concerning a "most highly secret operation" during informal discussions in the White House. He considered the discussions none of his business, and never pursued the issue.⁶⁰ The same month, Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Arleigh Burke, learned of CIA activities from Naval Intelligence sources in Guatemala and Nicaragua. General George Decker, the Army Chief of Staff, learned several weeks later when the operation had grown into plans for an invasion. And finally, the Marine Corps Commandant, General David Shoup, found out by accident when he discovered a large cache of rifles being prepared for shipment to a base in Texas.⁶¹

Throughout the planning, Bissell refused to call on the military for any assistance. This became particularly disturbing to the Navy when the CIA decided to expand into the business of amphibious warfare. This came to light when General Lemnitzer received a call from Admiral Robert L.

Dennison, Commander in Chief Atlantic (CINCLANT). Admiral Dennison was none too amused to report that one of his commanders had been approached by the CIA with an order to requisition his vessel. Dennison demanded a brief. Lemnitzer professed to know little of what was going on and called Allen Dulles to arrange a brief for the Admiral.

The CIA Director dispatched Bissell to the Admiral's headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia, to deliver a "sketchy" summary of the operation. Dennison's anger was not abated when Bissell could not provide answers to the Admiral's queries about the Navy's responsibilities to protect the Guantanamo naval base or about the evacuation of U.S. citizens from the Cuban island. It was Dennison's suspicion that the CIA had not considered these details in their planning. His concerns were further heightened when, on 20 December, he sent Washington 119 questions concerning the project and only twelve were answered. At this point, however, Dennison knew more about the operation than did the Chief of Naval Operations.⁶²

Owing to the extreme secrecy surrounding the evolving plan, these concerns never surfaced in the White House. A recurring theme throughout the planning stages was that the CIA's tightly controlled access had the net effect of diffusing criticism from the military.

On 28 January 1961, during a National Security Council meeting, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were officially

introduced to the CIA operation. General Gray, who had earlier chaired a committee to study military options in Cuba, was directed to chair the committee that would report on the military's review of the CIA plan as directed by the President. Gray's committee was hamstrung from the beginning. The CIA, with the President's concurrence, limited the circulation of the plan, making Gray's committee necessarily small. During the CIA briefing, the members of Gray's group were not permitted to take notes and were given no copies of the CIA plan itself. As a result, they were forced to reconstruct the briefing from memory to complete their report.⁶³ The resultant "fair chance" of success report was never fully explained. General Gray reported later that he meant 3 to 1 against success. This caveat was never offered to the CIA or the President.⁶⁴ The principal problem with the JCS report was that it sent no clear signal to the President concerning the true level of support within the military for or against the plan. Kennedy's dilemma was unchanged. Too much military intervention would reveal the true U.S. role in the operation; too little could doom the plan to failure.

Unrelated to the development of the Bay of Pigs, the Navy had been stepping up its activity in the Caribbean to counter what it perceived to be a Soviet threat developing in Cuba. A standing naval force, made up of a destroyer squadron and Marine Amphibious Ready Group, was established

and based in Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico. Guantanamo Bay was being used with greater frequency to provide refresher training (intensive training in combat systems drills, engineering and damage control in preparation for overseas deployment) for Atlantic Fleet warships.

When Admiral Dennison learned of the CIA's plan, he further increased activity in the region, and intensified his staff's contingency planning. He had no idea what role he would be playing but was certain he would be called upon. He directed surface ships undergoing training to conduct electronic surveillance, and used submarines, operating from their bases in Key West, to monitor shipping in and out of Cuba and conduct fact-finding missions off the Cuban coast. Further, Dennison requested assistance from the Commander, Strategic Air Command (CINCSAC), through the JCS, for the protection of Key West. This led to the conduct of Exercise "Southern Tip" in April 1961. This was a joint exercise which integrated forces under the Commander of the North American Air Defense (CONAD) and added them to the defense and surveillance of the south Florida coast.⁶⁵ To avoid the perception of a military buildup all this activity was conducted under the guise of training and none of these assets were specifically targeted for use in the Bay of Pigs operation.

The anti-submarine warfare (ASW) carrier USS Essex (CVS 9) and her six ship ASW squadron were chosen to provide

support for the invasion. The carrier was to embark a squadron of AD-4 Skyhawk jet aircraft and, along with five destroyers, were to escort the invasion fleet to a point outside the Bay of Pigs. The carrier was to stand off while two destroyers were to rendezvous with the Cuban ships and guard them against possible enemy interference. The commander of the task force, Rear Admiral John A. Clark, was under strict orders that he was not to fire a shot except in absolute self-defense. The squadron sailed from Norfolk, Virginia, under the cover of participating in anti-submarine warfare exercises scheduled in the Gulf of Mexico 3-18 April.⁶⁶

The Bay of Pigs operation quickly turned into the fiasco for which it is renowned. The limited air strike of 15 April did not destroy the Cuban air force, but only served to alert Castro of the impending invasion. The resultant condemnation of United States actions in the United Nations caused Kennedy to cancel a second strike on the 15th and, perhaps more devastatingly, the air strikes that were to accompany the invaders on the 17th. The result was that the invaders met a fully prepared Castro with his air force nearly intact. The invasion was doomed without further U.S. intervention.⁶⁷

The carrier Essex stood poised to intervene but Kennedy refused. He also denied Admiral Burke's suggestion that offshore destroyers assist with naval gunfire. In a

heated exchange Kennedy told the Admiral, "Burke, I don't want the United States involved in this." Admiral Burke's response was, "Hell, Mr. President, we are involved!"⁶⁸

Late on the evening of the nineteenth the destroyer Eaton was ordered in to evacuate the invading forces survivors.⁶⁹

Without a clear United States military objective at the outset, or ultimately, a definitive role for the military during the operation, there is no quantifiable means by which to judge the success of American military actions at the Bay of Pigs. By all accounts, President Kennedy's employment of them was an unqualified disaster. The principal reason is that Kennedy unwittingly sabotaged the military aspects of the plan in order to reduce any potential political damage which might result from its execution. He steadfastly refused to appreciate the military implications of what was to transpire and naively maintained the belief that somehow the United States could credibly deny participation in the operation.

Nevertheless, all indications are that the military made all preparations to make the plan work. Admiral Dennison (CINCLANT) did what he could to ensure assets were in place to support the invasion. He did so without direction from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Admiral related: "I...got one of my ASW carriers (the U.S.S. Essex) and took all the ASW planes off and put fighters on there, equipped with rockets. And well, I did all--made all kinds

of preparations without consulting anybody because I could foresee that...this thing was going to be a debacle and we'd better be prepared to do almost anything."⁷⁰ Enroute to the Caribbean the Essex airwing, not yet certain what their mission would be, conducted intensive air-to-air and ground support training in preparation for any eventuality.

The Joint Chiefs were unanimous in their assessment that the invasion would have succeeded had the planned air strikes been carried out and, once the operation was underway, air cover and shore bombardment provided. Militarily, Kennedy's greatest failure was in not unequivocally erasing all doubts in the minds of military planners and insurgents that American military power would not be brought to bear to assist in the invasion under any circumstance. By subordinating military decisions to political concerns Kennedy subjected himself to useless JCS advice.

Why the Bay of Pigs?

In the end, the "Cuba problem" was not a crisis that required immediate action. By defining it as such, the Bay of Pigs exposed an Administration that was ill-prepared for crisis decision-making, and sent a message to the world that the new President was too narrowly focused on a single objective and too weak to carry out a bold foreign policy agenda.

Some Kennedy advisors dismissed the decision as resulting from bureaucratic momentum inherited from the previous administration. Dean Acheson, chairman of Kennedy's Advisory Committee on NATO, stated that the only explanation for the operation was that the "mere inertia of the Eisenhower plan carried it to execution. All that the present administration did was to take out of it those elements of strength essential to its success."⁷¹ Others, such as Kennedy Special Counsel Theodore Sorensen, believed that the key to the President's decision was that Kennedy thought he was approving a plan that in the end was different than the plan the CIA and JCS perceived would be executed.⁷² The operation's principal drafters, as well as the military, envisioned an invasion with United States support. Kennedy failed to acknowledge the plan's military realities.

The existing study of the Bay of Pigs is replete with possible explanations for President Kennedy's decision. The most credible among them are Cold War posturing, domestic politics, and a desire to portray the image of a strong, decisive leader. Taken cumulatively, and in the context of the Cold War mindset, it appears that Kennedy made the easiest decision available to him that, if successful, would have generated the greatest political dividends. To do nothing would have been counter to his campaign themes of providing youthful, vigorous and

proactive leadership in a world in which the United States was the only counter to Soviet Communist expansion. To do more, and not succeed, could have drawn the United States into a protracted conflict which would result in political suicide.

A recurring theme was Kennedy's concern that he not appear weak in the world community. By allowing his concern for politics, of which his image was a critical element, take precedence over military and diplomatic considerations, President Kennedy made a clearly disastrous decision which would bias his foreign policy decision-making and use of the military for the remainder of his Presidency.

CHAPTER 3

CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

The Making of a Crisis

The Bay of Pigs operation very likely provided the impetus for the events which eventually resulted in the Cuban Missile Crisis. After its failure, President Kennedy privately expressed dissatisfaction with his advisors and grew increasingly determined to rid himself of Castro. Publicly, he readily accepted the blame and continued his commitment to American non-intervention in Cuba.

On 20 April, the day after the Bay of Pigs, President Kennedy addressed the American Society of Newspaper Editors. The theme of his speech focused on his policy of non-intervention and the lessons to be drawn from the recent experience in Cuba. In what was to be his public posture on Cuba until the missile crisis, Kennedy stated:

I have emphasized before that this was a struggle of Cuban patriots against a Cuban dictator. While we could not be expected to hide our sympathies, we made it repeatedly clear that the armed forces of this country would not intervene in any way.

Any unilateral intervention, in the absence of an external attack upon ourselves or an ally, would have been contrary to our traditions and to our international obligations....I want it clearly understood that this government will not hesitate in meeting its primary obligations which are to the security of our nation.

....We intend to reexamine and reorient our forces of all kinds, our tactics and other institutions here in this community. We intend to intensify our efforts for a struggle in many ways more difficult than war...¹

With the final phrases, Kennedy was sending a signal that his efforts against Cuba would not end. His reference to institutions was presumably directed at the roles the CIA and the military would assume in future operations.

In White House meetings, and in statements to the press, Kennedy was adamant about assuming the responsibility for the Bay of Pigs. When Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson directed criticism at the CIA, Kennedy remarked, "Lyndon, you've got to remember we're all in this and that, when I accepted responsibility for this operation, I took the entire responsibility on myself, and I think we should have no sort of passing of the buck or backbiting, however justified." To emphasize the point, a few days later the White House released a statement that read: "President Kennedy has stated from the beginning that as President he bears sole responsibility.... The President is strongly opposed to anyone within or without the administration attempting to shift the responsibility."² These statements downplayed President Kennedy's private misgivings about the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the CIA. The staff reorganization that produced the decision-making apparatus that would serve him during the missile crisis was quietly being set in motion.

The immediate personal lesson President Kennedy seemed to draw from his Bay of Pigs experience was, unfortunately, the wrong one. In the President's view, his senior military advisors could not be entrusted to make decisions which reflected considerations that included other than purely military objectives. More pragmatically, the President believed, they were incapable of making decisions which had his best interest in mind. This perception was in keeping with his pre-election views of senior military officers.

Despite attempts at political damage control and an obvious desire to put the Bay of Pigs behind him, President Kennedy was besieged by stinging critiques of his performance and a demand for action. In a private meeting with Eisenhower, Kennedy was asked by the former President why he decided against the use of air power during the invasion. Kennedy's explanation was that he feared a Soviet response in Berlin and therefore he wanted to "keep our hands from showing in the affair." Eisenhower thought it incredible that Kennedy believed the world would not suspect American involvement, and on the subject of Soviet reaction, Eisenhower proved to be a prophet when he stated, "The Soviets follow their own plans, and if they see us show any weakness then [sic] is when they press us the hardest.... The failure of the Bay of Pigs will embolden the Soviets to do something that they would not otherwise do." Further,

Eisenhower critiqued, "I believe there is only one thing to do when you go into this kind of thing. It must be a success." Kennedy assured him, "hereafter, if we get in anything like this, it will be a success."³

President Kennedy received a similar response from former Vice-President Nixon. In response to Kennedy's concerns about the Soviets and Berlin, Nixon replied: "Khrushchev will prod and probe in several places at once. When we show weakness, he'll create crisis [sic] to take advantage of us. We should act in Cuba and Laos, including, if necessary, a commitment of U.S. air power." Nixon professed that an invasion of Cuba could be justified under the guise of protecting American citizens in that country.⁴ Such frank advice from former rivals served to strengthen Kennedy's resolve for a strategy of action against Cuba.

General Maxwell Taylor's Cuba Study Group, although generally not critical of President Kennedy's role in the Bay of Pigs, nevertheless, also called for action. The Taylor report concluded, "There can be no long-term living with Castro as a neighbor.... While inclining personally to a positive course of action against Castro without delay, we recognize the danger of dealing with the Cuban problem outside the context of the world situation." The report went on to describe the existence of a "life-and-death struggle" which the United States "may be losing" with the Soviet Union.⁵

Robert F. Kennedy, the President's brother and Attorney General, added, "Not many are really prepared to send American troops in there at the present time, but maybe that is the answer. Only time will tell."⁶ No evidence exists to suggest an invasion of Cuba was ever seriously contemplated by the administration, but the private discussions and public pressures demanded action.

However naive Kennedy may have been with regard to foreign policy when he came into office, the Bay of Pigs served as a rude introduction into superpower politics. His first attempt to exercise his "flexible response" strategy was a disaster. He was failing in the very arena he chose as the principal battleground for his campaign rhetoric. His desire was to turn the country's attention to other areas in which his strategy could be successfully used. He would have his opportunity at the ensuing Vienna Summit Conference.

If the Bay of Pigs served as the catalyst for the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy's Vienna meeting with Khrushchev in June of 1961 accelerated events. Although the Bay of Pigs and Cuba occupied only a small portion of the Summit's agenda, the timidity with which President Kennedy addressed the issue seemingly convinced Khrushchev that Kennedy was weak and lacked the resolve to commit American troops in a crisis. In the short term, Khrushchev chose Berlin to exploit what he perceived to be the President's

lost confidence and diminished world stature. In the long term he chose the emplacement of missiles in Cuba.

After the Summit, Kennedy clearly believed Khrushchev had gotten the best of him. In an interview with James Reston of the New York Times, Kennedy described the encounter as the "Roughest thing in my life." In an attempt to explain Khrushchev's attitude, Kennedy continued:

I've got two problems. First, to figure out why he did it, and in such a hostile way. And second, to figure out what we can do about it.

I think the first part is pretty easy to explain. I think he did it because of the Bay of Pigs. I think he thought that anyone who was so young and inexperienced as to get into that mess could be taken. And anyone who got into it and didn't see it through had no guts. So he just beat hell out of me....I've got a terrible problem. If he thinks I'm inexperienced and have no guts, until we remove those ideas we won't get anywhere with him. So we have to act.⁷

An astute self-analysis, the very reason the Soviet Union deployed missiles to Cuba may have been Khrushchev's perception that Kennedy--based on his performance at the Bay of Pigs--would respond militarily only to counter direct aggression against the United States. Kennedy was certain his performance at the Vienna Summit reinforced Khrushchev's beliefs. Kennedy was determined to prove him wrong.

Privately, Kennedy was intensifying efforts to topple Castro. The CIA's Deputy Director for plans, Richard Helms, described as "white heat" the pressure he had been feeling from the President about Cuba since the Bay of Pigs. The President used Robert Kennedy to get his message across

to the CIA. Speaking for the President, the Attorney General relayed to Helms, "Get on with this thing! God, you've got to do something about it!" In an ensuing meeting, Helms was told "that getting rid of Castro was the top priority in the U.S. government. All else is secondary. No time, money, effort, or manpower is to be spared."⁸

Operation Mongoose, which grew to become the largest of the CIA's covert operations, was the result. Major General Edward Lansdale, a counterinsurgency specialist, was placed in charge of the operation. He formulated a six phase plan which was to "culminate with an open revolt and overthrow of the Communist regime."⁹ It consisted of at least thirty-three different schemes that were targeted principally at the Cuban economy.¹⁰ It included a host of activities that in the end only served to harm the Cuban population, and give Castro and the Soviets further cause to suspect that an American invasion of Cuba was not beyond the realm of possibility. All of these activities were in keeping with Kennedy's "flexible response" strategy and fondness for covert operation.

A lesson apparently not learned from the Bay of Pigs experience was that the task of eliminating the Castro government was one that should not be left with the CIA. Increasingly, the President's seemingly genuine desire to eliminate any vestige of communism from the western hemisphere, and his increasing personal animosity toward

Castro, demanded continued efforts to effect his overthrow. As in the Bay of Pigs, however, political expediency overruled sound judgment.

Domestic political pressure for action continued to build. As the November mid-term elections were approaching in 1962, Cuba once again occupied the public debate. In August, Indiana Republican Senator Homer E. Capehart stated, "It is high time that the American people demand that President Kennedy quit 'examining the situation' and start protecting the interests of the United States."¹¹ In response to increased Soviet troop buildup in Cuba, Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, went so far as to urge a U.S. invasion of Cuba. In early September, a group of Republican Senators introduced a Joint Congressional Resolution which authorized the use of American troops in Cuba.¹² On the eve of the missile crisis, doing nothing was an option that was quickly dissipating.

As the events of the missile crisis unfolded, domestic political considerations were not far from the surface during discussions on options to pursue. During the deliberations, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara offered, "A missile is a missile. It makes no great difference whether you are killed by a missile from the Soviet Union or from Cuba."¹³ This opinion was quickly subordinated by concerns from some Kennedy advisors "that if we allow Cuba to complete installation and operational readiness of missile

bases, the next House of Representatives is likely to have a Republican majority."¹⁴ McNamara's interpretation on 16 October 1962: "I'll be quite frank, I don't think there is a military problem here.... This is a domestic political problem."¹⁵ For pragmatic political reasons Kennedy had to act.

Kennedy's New Team

Though outwardly Kennedy remained calm and courageously accepted the blame for the Bay of Pigs debacle, privately he felt his "experts" had failed him. In a private discussion with his Special Counsel, Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy inquired, "How could I have been so far off base? All my life I've known better than to depend on experts. How could I have been so stupid to let them go ahead?"¹⁶ In another private moment he said to his Special Assistant, Arthur Schlesinger, "My God, the bunch of advisors we inherited.... Can you imagine being President and leaving behind someone like all those people there?"¹⁷ He most clearly felt betrayed by the CIA, the Joint Chiefs, and to some degree, the State Department. Henceforth, President Kennedy was determined to have a firmer grasp on his administration's foreign policy.¹⁸ He would do so by further tightening his inner circle of advisors.

After the Bay of Pigs President Kennedy was determined not to rely solely on experts any longer. He was inclined to make greater use of those advisors in whom he

had developed personal confidence and whom he considered generalists. The process whereby he would replace incumbent advisors with those of his own choosing was greatly accelerated.

Robert Kennedy and Theodore Sorensen, neither of whom were involved in the Bay of Pigs decisions, became the President's most trusted confidants and would be present for every crisis decision for the remainder of his Presidency. McGeorge Bundy would assume greater responsibilities in his role as National Security Advisor. Maxwell Taylor was brought in as a source of alternate military advice. Lastly, all close advisors were encouraged to provide "unfettered and confidential" advice to the President.¹⁹ The most obvious organization which was left out of this new national security apparatus was the military and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Robert Kennedy was perhaps the Administration's most ready critic of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During the missile crisis Robert Kennedy wrote of his reaction to one of the military briefings, "I thought, as I listened, of the many times that I had heard the military take positions which, if wrong, had the advantage that no one would be around at the end to know."²⁰ Robert Kennedy, it appeared, never fully trusted the Joint Chiefs to look after the President's best interests.

McGeorge Bundy developed into the Administration's focal point on military matters and foreign affairs. He was moved from the Executive Office Building to the West Wing of the White House and given responsibility for coordinating access to the President on security matters. He started regularly scheduled morning meetings of his National Security Council staff which routinely included representatives from the CIA, Defense and State Departments. This increased his value to the President and, in turn, strengthened the President's grasp of the relevant issues with the fewest number of advisors.²¹

In late June 1961, Maxwell Taylor officially became a member of Kennedy's team. As Military Representative of the President (Milrep), Taylor was to serve as a staff officer whose responsibility it was to advise and assist the President in matters concerning the military. Additionally, he was assigned in an advisory capacity to Cold War planning and in the intelligence field, with particular emphasis in Berlin and Southeast Asia. To assure there were no appearances of conflicts with those individuals who had statutory responsibility to the President--Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Director of the CIA, the Secretary of Defense, and the National Security Advisor--Kennedy emphasized that Taylor would have no command authority and was not to intervene between the President and any of those individuals or agencies.²²

Taylor set out quickly to allay any animosity he was certain his new role would develop within the Joint Chiefs. In an early meeting with the Chairman, General Lemnitzer, Taylor suggested that the members of the JCS and he exchanged views on issues they were working concurrently before official papers were forwarded to the President. The Chairman agreed and, in an apparent reference to already published press comments, said he would do all he could to prevent any wedges from being driven between them. Taylor later wrote: "After these initial understandings our relations proceeded with no friction of which I was ever aware, although I am quite sure that the Chiefs, as a body, never cared for the 'Milrep' as an institution."²³

Taylor soon became a trusted advisor of the President. Sorensen wrote that Kennedy sought military advisors whose thinking was in line with his own. Apparently lacking faith in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the President found the trusted military advice he was seeking in the person of General Maxwell Taylor.²⁴

Owing to proximity and trust, Kennedy was increasingly turning to Taylor rather than the JCS for military advice. This trend would continue unabated until General Taylor assumed the position of Chairman a year later. Even with his appointment as Chairman it is debatable whether the Pentagon advice that eventually

reached the President was unbiased military counsel or simply General Taylor's politically sensitized viewpoint.

The Executive Committee

On the morning of 16 October 1962, McGeorge Bundy delivered the news to the President that U-2 photographs provided evidence of the existence of missile sites in Cuba. After being convinced of the evidence, Kennedy directed Bundy to commence low-level reconnaissance flights and to call a meeting of top officials and close advisors. At eleven forty-five that morning the first meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (EXCOMM) was convened.²⁵

Kennedy expressed a desire to limit the participants in the deliberations to generally the small group assembled at the first meeting. It was his intent to present the evidence to the Soviets, at a time of his choosing, and to do so with complete surprise to gain the initiative in whatever maneuvering might ensue. To conduct a large National Security Council (NSC) meeting, the President reasoned, would surely cause leaks. He wanted no signs of unusual activities.²⁶

Large National Security Council meetings had been commonplace during the Eisenhower Administration. One of Kennedy's first official acts after his inauguration was to sign an executive order abolishing much of the statutory membership of the Council. The creation of the EXCOMM

effectively eliminated the formal apparatus of the NSC that was intended to provide advice to the President.

Kennedy chose members of the EXCOMM not so much because of position but because of personal confidence and reliability. The principal participants included Vice-President Johnson, Secretary of Defense McNamara, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of the Treasury C. Douglas Dillon, Attorney General Kennedy, CIA Director John H. McCone, Undersecretary of State George W. Ball, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell L. Gilpatric, Ambassador-at-large Llewellyn E. Thompson, Special Counsel Sorensen, National Security Advisor Bundy and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Taylor. Other nonmembers were occasionally included in the meetings.²⁷

From the outset, two traditional Presidential decision-making bodies were excluded, as organizations, from the President's group of advisors. The President's own Cabinet and, with the noticeable exception of General Taylor, the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Kennedy believed the Cabinet was not suited for the crisis management role, and few of its members had ascended to a place of complete confidence in the President's inner circle. As for the Joint Chiefs, Kennedy never fully regained his confidence in them since the Bay of Pigs and was perfectly satisfied to go to General Taylor for military advice. Demonstrating a continued indifference to JCS advice, Kennedy once remarked,

"They advise you the way a man advises another one about whether he should marry a girl. They don't have to live with her."²⁸ This perception of the Joint Chiefs remained despite the fact that, with the exception of Marine Corps Commandant General Shoup, all were different than the ones in office during the Bay of Pigs.

For much of the deliberations during the Cuban Missile Crisis General Taylor remained the only sounding board for the Joint Chiefs, and their sole access to the President. The Chiefs made only rare appearances at the EXCOMM meetings and, when they did so, had little influence on the proceedings and ultimately, the President's decisions.

President Kennedy was impressed by the military effort, particularly the deployment of Navy vessels, the continuous alert by Air Force crews, and the movement of Army and Marine troops to the southeastern part of the United States, but he was considerably less impressed by the military representatives with whom he met. President Kennedy was concerned by the Joint Chiefs' limited military focus. Robert Kennedy wrote that the President believed the Chiefs "seemed to give so little consideration to the implications of steps they suggested. They seemed always to assume that if the Russians and the Cubans would not respond or, if they did, that a war was in our national interest." He continued, "when the Russians answered they were

withdrawing their missiles, it was suggested by one high military adviser that we attack Monday in any case."²⁹

After each EXCOMM meeting throughout the crisis, General Taylor would promptly return to the Pentagon to brief the Joint Chiefs, and ensure military requirements that had come out of the meeting were set into motion. General Taylor was often subjected to pointed questioning by the Joint Chiefs to ensure their positions were being appropriately defended. On occasion, when the Chiefs expressed skepticism at General Taylor's efforts in presenting their views to the President, Taylor would offer to arrange a meeting for the Chiefs with the President "at which I promised to hold their coats," so they might express their individual opinions in person. They declined. On 19 October, at General Taylor's suggestion, the President invited the Joint Chiefs to a meeting to hear their views.³⁰ This meeting did little except make the Chiefs feel better. By this time, the President, with strong endorsements from Defense Secretary McNamara and Attorney General Kennedy, had virtually decided on the blockade as a course of action.³¹

The diversity of the membership of the EXCOMM and the free-wheeling nature of the discussions provided the President with a wide range of responses to the Soviet emplacement of missiles in Cuba. The options ranged from doing nothing, to a pre-emptive air strike followed by an

invasion of Cuba. Doing nothing was categorically rejected from the outset. Domestic political pressures and continuing Presidential rhetoric necessarily demanded action. The lessons of the Bay of Pigs and Kennedy's own beliefs about his dealings with Khrushchev further fueled his desire for positive action.

Although the EXCOMM considered diplomatic options in response to the Soviet missiles in Cuba, its principal preoccupation was in addressing military responses. Because of his September 1962 pledge to do whatever was necessary to counter any "offensive" missiles in Cuba, and his warning to the Soviets against building missile bases on the island, the President believed that the American people would demand a military response. As Undersecretary of State Ball pointed out on 16 October: "...as far as the American people are concerned, action means military action, period."³²

After some diplomatic posturing at the first EXCOMM meeting, the meeting soon settled on the discussion of three military options: (1) "a single, quick surgical strike on the missile bases;" (2) "a broad air bombardment of various Cuban facilities;" or (3) "either of these two strikes plus a mopping-up invasion of Cuba." A naval blockade, the course eventually selected, was suggested during an evening session on the first day of deliberations.³³

In the aggregate the formation of the EXCOMM was a sharp departure from the immediate past. It circumvented the role normally intended for the NSC and JCS and provided President Kennedy the deliberate, all-inclusive decision-making lacking during the Bay of Pigs. For the President's purposes, and based on the outcome of the crisis, its creation has been regarded as a success. For its actual utility as a crisis management tool its value was dubious. Misperceptions of intentions by both sides--revealed many years after the crisis--and maneuverings by Kennedy and Khrushchev during the crisis, undermined the ultimate effectiveness and value of the EXCOMM.

Soviet Decision

In his memoirs, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev wrote that the idea to deploy nuclear missiles to Cuba first came to him during a visit to Bulgaria 14-20 May 1962. The genesis of the decision grew out of Khrushchev's concern for the American deployment of Jupiter missiles in Turkey. He wrote:

The Americans had surrounded our country with military bases and threatened us with nuclear weapons, and now they would learn just what it feels like to have enemy missiles pointing at you; we'd be doing nothing more than giving them a little of their own medicine.³⁴

The secondary issue, as far as Khrushchev was concerned at the time, was to protect Cuba from what appeared to be an imminent invasion by the United States.

In early discussions with his closest advisors, only two credible doubts concerning the deployment of missiles to Cuba surfaced. The first was getting Castro to agree and, the second was being able to deploy the missiles secretly. Khrushchev disregarded the concern of some that the deployment of the missiles would cause a "political explosion" in the Kennedy Administration.³⁵

The Soviet request to Cuba was packaged "as an offer of military support 'all the way up to...deploying...Soviet medium-range missiles' on Cuban territory, if the Cubans considered that it would be a useful measure to deter the 'potential aggressor' from attack." Fidel Castro quickly agreed to the proposal and expressed confidence that the deployment could be done secretly.³⁶

Ultimately, the Soviet decision to deploy missiles in Cuba was borne out of three principal concerns: (1) the defense of Cuba against an American invasion; (2) to address the strategic inferiority suffered by the Soviets; and (3) in response to the American overseas deployment of missiles. The first of these was the official Soviet rationale for their missile deployment after the crisis itself.³⁷ During a 1989 conference at which American, Soviet, and Cuban participants in the crisis were in attendance, Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister in 1962, responded to a question concerning Soviet intentions: "Their action was intended to strengthen the defensive stability of Cuba. To

avert the threats against it. I repeat, to strengthen the defensive capability of Cuba. That is all."³⁸ This belief seemed to be the prevailing view among many of the participants on the Soviet and Cuban side; however, as noted previously, Premier Khrushchev was undeniably agitated by the American missiles in Turkey and the earlier revelation of the false missile gap.

Certainly the Bay of Pigs provided a precedent for United States intervention in Cuba. Further provocation was provided throughout 1961 and 1962 through covert action and military exercises. From 19 April to 11 May 1962, the U.S. military conducted Operation Quick Kick off the southeastern coast of the United States. Seventy-nine ships, 300 aircraft, and more than 40,000 troops participated in the exercise. The Soviets presumed (correctly) the United States was exercising a war plan for the invasion of Cuba.³⁹

Covert activity under Operation Mongoose was also intensifying in Cuba and was becoming decidedly less covert. Secretary McNamara later commented, "If I was a Cuban and read the evidence of covert American action against their government, I would be quite ready to believe that the U.S. intended to mount an invasion."⁴⁰ The very premise under which the missiles were withdrawn was an American pledge not to invade Cuba.

The disclosure of the false "missile gap" after Kennedy's election damaged the Soviet's Cold War prestige--a posture from which they had yet to recover. The gap opened further in favor of the Western Alliances under Kennedy's defense buildup. In early 1963 the Western Alliances had a 6 to 1 advantage in Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM), and a 3 to 1 advantage in Long-Range Bombers. In pragmatic terms, the quickest and most cost-effective means of countering that advantage was the emplacement of Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBM) in Cuba.⁴¹

In keeping with Cold War politics, the White House leaked to the press that the Jupiter missiles were fully operational in Turkey in April 1962. The announcement very nearly coincided with the military's Operation Quick Kick exercise--CINCLANT's contingency plan against Cuba.⁴² The cumulative affect of American actions, in concert with Soviet and Cuban perceptions of American intentions in a Cold War environment, contributed to Khrushchev's decision to deploy missiles in Cuba.

Military Role

Military operations coincident with the Cuban Missile Crisis covered a considerably longer time-frame than the now famous thirteen days in October 1962. On 1 October, in response to the American discovery of Soviet IL-28 medium bombers in Cuba, Defense Secretary McNamara directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to intensify contingency planning for

Cuba. Admiral Dennison, Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic (CINCLANT), was alerted to prepare blockade plans as part of contingency preparations. Subsequent large scale movements were conducted under the guise of PHIBRIGLEX 62, a large amphibious assault exercise previously scheduled for 15-20 October. The Atlantic Fleet was placed in its highest state of readiness on 6 October. It remained there, along with other elements of the United States Armed Forces, until 20 November, the day after Castro announced he would not object to the Soviet withdrawal of the IL-28 bombers. The naval quarantine was in effect from 24 October to 20 November. The term "quarantine" was chosen by the President because he feared "blockade" could have been interpreted as an act of war.⁴³

In military terms, the Cuban Missile Crisis was the first true success of President Kennedy's "flexible response" strategy. Kennedy's commitment to a capable conventional force, particularly the attainment of maritime superiority, very likely averted a confrontation with the Soviets which possibly could have escalated into a nuclear war. As Kennedy articulated while formulating his national security doctrine, capable conventional forces are not in themselves a deterrent. However, in this instance they helped nuclear deterrence work. Without a strong conventional force the United States would have been unable to make credible demands short of nuclear war.

Despite the obvious military successes the outcome of the crisis suggests, the military was affected throughout the operation by Kennedy's continued wariness of military advisors as a result of the Bay of Pigs. Even as events were leading toward the crisis, Kennedy was still lamenting that he "could have managed the military responsibilities of the Bay of Pigs better than the military experts."⁴⁴

While still in the deliberation process, Kennedy's attitude handicapped military efforts in two critical areas. As the only uniformed military member of the EXCOMM, General Taylor was not particularly qualified to discuss the pros and cons of either blockades or air strikes, the principal options being considered by the EXCOMM. His combat experience had been as commanding general of the 101st Airborne Division during World War II, followed by an assignment as commanding general of the Eighth Army during the Korean War. Most recently, his assignments had been exclusively in the diplomatic arena. He was not a champion of the greater level of military effort being advocated by the Joint Chiefs.⁴⁵ The Joint Chiefs, therefore, had little influence in shaping President Kennedy's perspective of the military options being pursued.

The second disadvantage the military endured was a result of President Kennedy's seemingly excessive concern for secrecy. Based on direction from the President, Secretary McNamara and General Taylor were to brief only the

Joint Chiefs themselves on the EXCOMM deliberations. Immediate subordinates were not allowed in these briefings. In one extreme case, Kennedy actually forbade General Taylor from briefing Admiral Dennison and his staff (the CINCLANT staff which would have been responsible for executing the eventual military option) on the results of the EXCOMM meetings for fear that the seriousness of the impending confrontation would be leaked to the public.⁴⁶ It was only because the military had recognized the strategic and political value of Cuba and had contingency plans prepared, that it was effectively able to deploy despite these obstacles.

Attempting to gain even greater control of military actions, Kennedy directed that he alone would decide which ships would be boarded by the Navy's blockading force after the quarantine went into effect. The President would issue his order to Secretary McNamara or General Taylor who would then deliver it to the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral George W. Anderson, in the Navy's Flag Plot in the Pentagon. The CNO would then transmit the orders to Admiral Dennison at his headquarters in Norfolk, or directly to Vice Admiral Alfred Ward, the Task Force Commander, on board the Newport News. To refute some suggestions that Kennedy communicated directly with ships at sea, Flag Plot Watch Officer Captain John H. Carmichael commented later, "I know of no incident

when civilian authorities gave orders directly to afloat forces."⁴⁷

Acknowledging that the President's direct intervention may have offended some of his military colleagues, General Taylor, nevertheless, staunchly supported Kennedy's actions. In his memoirs, General Taylor wrote of Kennedy's control: "It was a classic example of the use of military power for political purposes which, after all, is the prime justification for military power."⁴⁸ Considering the outcome, it is difficult to contradict Kennedy's desire for direct involvement in military decisions; however, most senior military leaders were clearly unhappy with his actions.

The JCS had begun developing contingency plans for Cuba as early as 1959 when Castro came to power. Admiral Dennison assumed the task of plan development in mid-1961. His staff subsequently drew up three plans; one plan for air strikes (OpPlan 312), and two plans for an invasion of the island (OpPlans 314 and 316).⁴⁹

OpPlan 312 presented options which included up to an all-out air campaign to gain air supremacy. OpPlan 314 was designed to be a deliberate invasion in which Marines would land in eastern Cuba, near Guantanamo, while the XVIII Airborne Corps seized four airfields around Havana. Special Forces teams would also deploy to facilitate the expected uprising against Castro. OpPlan 316 was similar to 314 but

was to be accomplished with much shorter notice, thereby restricting the initial assault to the Airborne Corps and whatever Marine units were either at sea or already in Guantanamo. Either OpPlan 314 or 316 would be preceded by the execution of 312. Preparations for the execution of these three plans went into full swing on 1 October when the CINCLANT commander, Admiral Dennison, was directed by Secretary McNamara to intensify his planning efforts.⁵⁰

According to Commander Gerry McCabe, the President's assistant naval aide during the crisis, Kennedy was made aware of the Soviet's intention to deploy missiles into Cuba as early as July. Unconfirmed sources in the Soviet government were reputed to have provided some intelligence to Kennedy. Additionally, large logistics movements at the Soviet ports of Odessa and Leningrad were drawing the interest of naval intelligence and American satellites.⁵¹

On 23 July, the Oxford, a sophisticated signals intelligence vessel, assumed a patrol off Cuba, sometimes closing to within 12 miles of Havana. An officer assigned to the Oxford, acknowledged, "The White House was aware of and approved our assignment to the areas and was apprised of our movements." Vice Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, a member of the CNO's staff, went so far as to state that, "electronic intelligence acquired by surface ships led to the photographic intelligence which gave us undisputable evidence of the...Soviet missiles in Cuba." Secretary

McNamara further stated that the intelligence gathered by Oxford was "valuable information, on the basis of which national policy was formulated."⁵² No source suggests that intercepts by Oxford confirmed the existence of offensive missiles in Cuba, but it did provide a wealth of information to Kennedy and his staff.

Perhaps hoping the Cuba problem would go away, Kennedy continued to ignore the Soviet arms buildup in Cuba for much of the summer of 1962. During that summer, sixty-one Soviet and Soviet Bloc vessels delivered troops, supplies and arms to Cuba. The military equipment included MIG-19 jet aircraft, tanks, battlefield artillery, rockets, trucks and small arms.⁵³

On 14 October, two U-2s provided photographic evidence of the Soviet deployment of medium and intermediate range ballistic missiles to Cuba. The JCS met on 16 October to consider military options for the removal of the missiles. They concluded that selected targeting of missile emplacements was not a sound military option, and told Secretary McNamara that any air strike should include "all missile sites, all combat aircraft and nuclear storage, combat ships, tanks and other appropriate military targets in Cuba, in conjunction with a complete blockade." They indicated that the air strike could be launched within twenty-four hours of authorization and that the Navy's Second Fleet was already moving into position from which to

impose a blockade. They further stated that the "elimination of the Castro regime," would require an invasion by American forces.⁵⁴ President Kennedy made it clear he preferred a more moderate response.

During EXCOMM deliberations on 18 October, the principal advantage of a blockade surfaced. The blockade could be announced as an initial response with the threat of further U.S. military action, as yet undefined, should the Soviets not withdraw the missiles. On 20 October, the EXCOMM voted 11 to 6 to recommend the blockade to the President. On the evening of 22 October, the President, on national television, announced his intentions to quarantine Cuba to interdict further Soviet arms shipments and force the removal of offensive weapons already in Cuba.⁵⁵

On 22 October the Strategic Air Command (SAC) was placed in Defense Condition (DEFCON) 2, while other military commands were placed in DEFCON 3 (DEFCONS refer to varying conditions of readiness with 5 being normal peacetime, and 1 being the maximum alert posture). This was only one of three cases ever in which global American military forces have been placed in DEFCON 3 or higher.⁵⁶ On the morning of 24 October, the naval quarantine went into effect.

A Military Success Story?

To the extent that decisions made by the military's civilian leadership--and the resultant military deployment--averted what almost certainly would have escalated into

global nuclear war (recent revelations that tactical battlefield nuclear weapons were operational at the time of the crisis suggest that, at a minimum, an American invasion of Cuba would have resulted in a regional nuclear conflict), actual military operations during the Cuban Missile Crisis can be judged a success.

Politically and diplomatically, Kennedy's handling of the crisis was hugely successful. His flexible response strategy had been validated and the United States was viewed as the dominant world military power. Although a small minority of world leaders viewed Kennedy's actions as reckless, he had clearly gained the worldwide prestige he coveted.

Militarily, the reaction of senior military officers was mixed. The JCS, as a body, had favored an invasion of Cuba and some believed an opportunity to finally rid the United States of Castro and the "Cuba problem" was missed. The CNO, Admiral Anderson, echoed what many senior officers believed by suggesting Kennedy conceded too much to the Soviets when he agreed to the removal of Jupiter missiles from Turkey. Vice Admiral John T. Hayward, commander of a carrier task force during the crisis, went so far as to proclaim of the outcome, "It was a defeat, and a cheap success for the Soviets."⁵⁷

Critiques of President Kennedy's decisions by members of the Joint Chiefs were unquestionably biased by

their resentment of the President for excluding the Chiefs during what they considered to be critical decision-making junctures. Many subtle comments by the Chiefs reveal a certain disdain for the manner in which General Taylor presented their views to the President. Additionally, they believed an inadequate flow of information was being provided to them from EXCOMM deliberations and presidential decisions. To compound matters, they were universally contemptuous of what they rightfully perceived as political leaders making military decisions.

On the point of military decision-making, considerable evidence exists to show that many of President Kennedy's decisions were poorly informed ones, and his control of military actions far from complete. The fundamental issue of establishing the blockade is a case in point. Why was it successful when there were already operational missiles on Cuba and Kennedy chose to execute the blockade in such a passive manner? The only plausible explanation was the United States' overwhelming conventional superiority--particularly at sea--and Kennedy's deft political jousting with Khrushchev.

Despite being severely hamstrung, the Navy did what it could to make the blockade work. The military's first clash with the President was over the issue of the distance from Cuba in which Soviet ships would be intercepted. The Navy opted for a blockade line of 800 miles in order to

remain beyond the striking distance of Soviet IL-28 bombers operating from the island. The President, oblivious to the military implications of this, insisted on 500 miles, reasoning it would allow Khrushchev additional time to turn his ships back. Some accounts indicate the blockade remained at 800 miles.⁵⁸

When the Navy discovered Soviet submarines operating near the blockade, the submarines were prosecuted by anti-submarine aircraft and surface ships and, once located, forced to the surface with low-power depth charges. Again, not recognizing the military issues involved, Kennedy gave his blessing only to the tracking of the submarines. Considering the potential danger of an undetected submarine amongst the American blockade line, Navy planners considered the aggressive action the militarily prudent thing to do.⁵⁹ Some writings have suggested that challenging the Soviet submarines lent credibility to an otherwise timid quarantine.

A third illustration of how tenuous Kennedy's control of the military actually was, but nevertheless served to lend increased military credibility to American resolve, was in actions taken by the United States Strategic Air Command (SAC). After being ordered to DEFCON 2 General Thomas Power, Commander-in-Chief of SAC, directed his aircrews to report their increased readiness status on unclassified circuits. He did so, on his own initiative, in

an effort to "rub it in." He was directed to go on full alert, not how to do it. Later accounts revealed this unauthorized display of American power was unknown to the President, the Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁶⁰

As these and other events portray, President Kennedy routinely subordinated military considerations for diplomatic and political ones. Perhaps still reticent about committing American troops and remaining extremely distrustful of the military hierarchy due to his Bay of Pigs experience, Kennedy preferred to trust his own judgement and that of close advisors whose thinking was similar to his own. The obvious results of the Cuban Missile Crisis were an accelerated Cold War arms race and Castro's continued dominance of Cuba. The critical military lesson was the value of maintaining a credible conventional force and using it from a position of strength to attain legitimate national policy objectives.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Kennedy Doctrine

President John F. Kennedy's use of the military in support of his foreign policy objectives can be divided into two very nearly distinct phases. Although there was no single defining moment which divides the two (the American/Soviet standoff in Berlin in October 1961 is a good candidate), they seem to coincide with the development of the American military's conventional force capability. Additionally, the President's increasing degree of commitment to his flexible response strategy, as it was evolving, can be measured by his maturation process while in office. His determination to atone for the humiliation of the Bay of Pigs provided suitable motivation to accelerate the process.

When President Kennedy entered the White House he clearly understood the interrelationship of the various tools available to him in the conduct of foreign policy. In his first State of the Union Message Kennedy declared, "Our greatest challenge is still the world that lies beyond the Cold War.... To meet this array of challenges...we must re-examine and revise our whole arsenal of tools: military,

economic and political. One must not overshadow the other. On the Presidential coat of arms, the American eagle holds in his right talon the olive branch, while in his left he holds a bundle of arrows. We intend to give equal attention to both."¹

As Kennedy quickly learned, his clearly articulated vision of America's role in the world would abruptly clash with Cold War realities. Nuclear age terms such as crisis management, and the preferable alternatives of crisis prevention and crisis avoidance, did not fit neatly into Kennedy's untested doctrine and political rhetoric.

In some cases, what appeared to be an exercise in power and influence by the United States--made possible solely by the backing of American military might--was, in actuality, an exercise in personal diplomacy by the President and his closest confidant, the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy.

Many studies of the Cuban Missile Crisis give enormous credit to the President's personal correspondence with Khrushchev, and his brother's secret shuttle diplomacy with Russian Ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin, as having provided the impetus for a peaceful resolution to the crisis. These studies conclude that it was the face-saving gestures provided the Soviets--such as the removal of American Jupiter missiles from Turkey and the assurance that the United States would not invade Cuba--rather than the

overt threat of American military action, that ultimately led to the Soviet decision to remove the missiles from Cuba.

The use of secret diplomacy as an integral part of his foreign policy strategy was not unprecedented for Kennedy. When American and Soviet tanks faced off in Berlin in 1961, the President directed Robert Kennedy to inform the Soviets that he wanted the tanks removed in twenty-four hours. Later accounts revealed the Attorney General provided secret concessions with the demand. A later Soviet Ambassador to Bonn, Valentin Falin, indicated that the Kennedy message provided a "certain flexibility" by suggesting that if the tanks "parted without damage to each other's prestige," the President would assert that the confrontation was a "productive, purely political exchange of opinions."²

The foregoing examples are not intended to convey that Kennedy intentionally undermined the role of the military, or invalidated his doctrine. Rather, they suggest that he could effectively use the diplomatic tool because he was doing so from a position of strength. The means by which he chose to do so were in keeping with his personality and the Cold War, pre-Watergate obsession with secrecy that was a matter of course for politicians of the day. Due to his concern that he portray an image of strength and resolve, it was critical that he appear to be a more formidable foe at the bargaining table than perhaps he

really was. Therefore, if it was, in fact, personal diplomacy that ultimately resolved crises, it was military strength that provided the private lever and public prestige Kennedy sought from his doctrine.

Kennedy's inclination to pursue diplomatic solutions was very likely a lesson borne out of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion and resultant worldwide condemnation. Curiously, had Kennedy pursued his inclination toward personal diplomacy with Khrushchev when the first evidence of Soviet missile emplacement in Cuba surfaced, the Cuban Missile Crisis may have been avoided entirely.

Kennedy Decision-Making

Arguably, the military--particularly the Joint Chiefs of Staff--were affected more than any organization as Kennedy's decision-making apparatus evolved while in the White House. This is owing to the fact that Kennedy was enamored with the military as his principal instrument of foreign policy, while maintaining a generally mixed opinion of senior military officers and the advice they offered. The Bay of Pigs operation and the Cuban Missile Crisis provide significant examples of how President Kennedy arrived at decisions to deploy the military, and once arriving at those decisions, how he chose to employ the military in pursuit of his policies.

Studies abound which attempt to categorize President Kennedy's decision-making during the Cuban Missile Crisis

into one of several political science models based mostly on Graham T. Allison's authoritative Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis. Considerably less exists in the study of the Bay of Pigs. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Allison's models place a great deal of emphasis on organizational dynamics and expected payoffs. The consideration of either of these by Kennedy was not in evidence during the Bay of Pigs.

Thomas Halper's discussion on presidential decision-making in Foreign Policy Crisis: Appearance and Reality in Decision Making more closely provides practical reasoning for Kennedy's decisions during both events. Halper's thesis--that it is the president, based on his perception of international and domestic realities, who define situations as "crises" and is then able to mislead the public on the nature of the crisis--has relevancy to both the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Bay of Pigs.

As illustrated earlier, the Bay of Pigs was a crisis of Kennedy's own choosing in which several interrelated factors contributed to his decision. Key among them was his perception of the strength of the domestic insurgency against Castro. Though certainly not of his choosing, some writings have postulated that the threat posed by Soviet missiles during the Cuban Missile Crisis was intentionally exaggerated to manipulate public perceptions of the magnitude of the crisis.

For the most part, each of the aforementioned studies regard the use of the military only in the periphery of decision-making considerations. A central point in most decision-making models (when deciding on the commitment of military forces) is an almost exclusive focus by the decision-maker on the reaction of the adversary. Absent concrete intelligence, the decision-maker tends to the conservative, while considerably exaggerating his opponents' capabilities. Armed with faulty intelligence, potentially disastrous decisions are made which could lead to failure. On this point, a similarity between the events emerges.

Each event exposed critical intelligence failures: the Bay of Pigs immediately after the fact; the Cuban Missile Crisis some years later. In both cases, the United States grossly underestimated the resolve of Castro and the Cuban population. The result during the Bay of Pigs was obvious; complete failure. The implication for military planners and civilian decision-makers during the Cuban Missile Crisis was potentially more disastrous. Even short of nuclear war, the United States was unprepared for the resistance it would have encountered had the situation escalated beyond the quarantine.

As President Kennedy's Defense Secretary, Robert McNamara, noted after a meeting of participants of the Crisis in 1989, "It had become clear that the decision of each of the three nations, immediately before and during the

crisis, had been distorted by misinformation, miscalculation, and misjudgment." Addressing military concerns was the revelation of the presence of 43,000 Soviet troops in Cuba augmenting a well-armed Cuban force of 270,000. Additionally, it was revealed that by October 24, 1962, twenty nuclear warheads had been delivered to the island. CIA estimates reported 10,000 Soviet troops on Cuba and no nuclear warheads.³ Regardless of the level of military escalation, numerous casualties would have resulted that the United States had not calculated in its contingency war planning.

With the obvious benefit of hindsight, it becomes clear that President Kennedy sorely underestimated the military implications of the decisions he made and policies he pursued in Cuba. The only decisions that mattered during the Bay of Pigs were his. After that it can be argued that he was simply overtaken by a series of significant events in which he can be scrutinized as closely for decisions he did not make as for those he did.

President Kennedy served in the White House during a period of extraordinary turbulence, or so the American public was led to believe. He defined the period as such during his campaign for the Presidency and lent it credibility with an ominous warning of impending peril during his first State of the Union Message. He further cemented the perception of crisis by his ill-fated decision

to launch the Bay of Pigs invasion so early in his Administration.

Whether Kennedy was a creator of crises, or simply the beneficiary of a great many of them is purely conjecture; nevertheless, the military was his instrument of choice in dealing with them. As a manager of crisis--from a purely military standpoint--his performance was suspect. For reasons presented earlier, he was not helped in this pursuit by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This fact can be attributed to the decision-making apparatus Kennedy chose for himself while in the White House.

Just as Kennedy's commitment to his "flexible response" strategy evolved as he matured in office, so too did the level of sophistication he displayed in the international arena. Similarly, the mechanism by which he chose to avail himself of critical information (information that would assist him in crisis decision-making) evolved as a result of the trials he underwent while in office. The roles he chose for his closest advisors represented the most significant evolution.

One of Kennedy's first actions in regard to his decision-making process was a restructuring and downsizing of the National Security Council (NSC). He disdained large, structured meetings and instead preferred "informal meetings and direct contacts."⁴ He brought with him to Washington a host of advisors who could be characterized as Ivy League

elitists with no ties to the military. Many of these were given the position of Special Assistant to the President and were to provide Kennedy with advise in particular areas of expertise. All of this proved for naught in Kennedy's Bay of Pigs decision as the new President was simply unprepared to use any conventional decision-making apparatus.

As Kennedy later admitted to Special Assistant Sorensen, "it is a tremendous change to go from being a Senator to being President. In the first months it is very difficult."⁵ In addition to pressure from the CIA, many sources credit Kennedy's father, Joseph P. Kennedy, for having had the greatest influence on the President's ultimate decision to go forward with the Bay of Pigs.⁶ Nevertheless, as detailed earlier, Kennedy made the most significant changes to his decision-making team immediately after the Bay of Pigs, culminating with the convening of the EXCOMM some eighteen months later.

In one of many Kennedy contradictions, for one who so loathed NSC and Cabinet meetings, it was the President who institutionalized the EXCOMM during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Some accounts dispute the actual value of the EXCOMM as a crisis decision-making body. Several members perceived that the meetings were dominated by Robert Kennedy who naturally had the most direct access to the President.

One occasional member of the EXCOMM, Dean Acheson, described the meetings as "JFK's circus approach to crisis

management--minus the ringmaster." He added that acknowledging the outcome as successful was paying "homage to plain dumb luck. It does not detract from President Kennedy's laurels in handling the Cuban crisis that he was helped by the luck of Khrushchev's befuddlement and loss of nerve. The fact was that he succeeded. However, as the Duke of Wellington said of Waterloo, it was 'a damned near thing.' And one should not play one's luck so far too often."⁷

Judging by the final outcome, Kennedy's decisions were clearly the correct ones. Taken as a whole, his role in the Cuban Missile Crisis can be described more as a arbitrator of a crisis he helped create, rather than the manager of one that was thrust upon him in which he could rightfully claim to be the victim. In the end, it appears the means by which he came upon his decisions were more of a product of his personality and Cold War politics than any decision-making apparatus that was available to him. The threat of a nuclear exchange magnified the importance of his decisions. The existence of a credible conventional military capability gave his decisions substance. Khrushchev had no such luxury.

Kennedy Personality

President Kennedy was undoubtedly one of the most charismatic Presidents of the twentieth century. His personality was infectious to those around him and seemed to

have an enormous influence on foreign policy formulation. Walt W. Rostow, who helped craft Kennedy's foreign policy, first as a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and later, as Assistant Secretary of State, remarked of Kennedy's personality and style, "It is extraordinary how the character of the President's personality shapes everything around him...it is the damned liveliest thing I have ever seen."⁸ Many of the President's closest advisors shared this view.

To provide a framework for Kennedy's decision-making style, four principal personality traits stand out. The first of these was Kennedy's tendency to develop intense personal rivalries with his key adversaries, particularly Nikita Khrushchev and Fidel Castro. The second was the deep trust he maintained in only his few closest advisors while generally distrusting advisors he did not know. The third was his apparent indecisiveness at critical junctures. Finally, and perhaps the personality trait which had the greatest influence on his decision-making, was a sense of his own historical greatness and concern for his political image.

Kennedy's rivalry with Khrushchev was primarily a product of East-West political realities. Although it does not appear that personal animosities between the two was reason for confrontation, Kennedy tended to resort to a decidedly personal tone when discussing his interactions

with Khrushchev. Decisions in American-Soviet relations would be made based on worldwide perceptions of the relative strengths of the two men. Prior to their first summit, Kennedy remarked of Khrushchev, "If he wants to rub my nose in the dirt, it's all over."⁹ The ensuing Vienna Summit, in which Kennedy acknowledged that Khrushchev had bested him, further fueled the rivalry. Kennedy's determination to never again appear weak on the international stage caused decisions to be made which were a result of the personal rivalry between the two leaders.

While the Kennedy-Khrushchev rivalry was borne principally out of the Cold War, the Kennedy-Castro rivalry had a more deep-seated personal character to it. Some writings suggest that Kennedy's attitude toward Castro was shaped as early as his days in the Senate. Kennedy felt betrayed after having supported Castro as a welcomed alternative to the Batista dictatorship, only to see him become increasingly radical in his leadership of Cuba and, eventually, come under the sphere of Soviet influence.¹⁰

After the Bay of Pigs, Special Assistant Sorensen wrote that Kennedy "should never have permitted his own deep feeling against Castro" to influence his decision to go ahead with the "project."¹¹ Clearly, Kennedy's tendency to harbor intense rivalries with his major adversaries had a significant influence on his decision-making.

A second Kennedy personality trait that affected his decision-making was the deep-rooted trust he had in advisors with whom he had a long association, and almost universal distrust of those with whom he was unfamiliar. The manner in which Kennedy restructured his White House staff after the Bay of Pigs is well documented and is included in Chapter Three. As indicated previously, the Joint Chiefs of Staff suffered as much, in terms of trust, as any organization from the new Kennedy arrangement. Additionally, the incorrect lesson Kennedy took from the Bay of Pigs experience served mostly to insulate him from critical advice that would have assisted him in his decision-making.

In addition to attempts by the civilian leadership to control the conduct of the quarantine, another illustration of the distrust Kennedy had for the military can be found during the Cuban Missile Crisis. After viewing photography of Soviet and Cuban aircraft lined up wing tip to wing tip on an airfield in Cuba, Kennedy inquired of the military if its own aircraft were not similarly vulnerable. Despite being assured that everything possible was being done to protect American aircraft on the ground, Kennedy ordered General Taylor to have a U-2 fly a photographic mission over Florida airfields to see for himself. Distressed at what he saw Kennedy ordered the Air Force to disperse the aircraft.¹²

Again, by not putting any trust in the advice of military advisors, Kennedy failed to take into consideration the military implications of the decision he made. With all available Tactical Air Command and Navy aircraft deployed to Florida in a maximum readiness posture there was no room to disperse the aircraft further. With combat air patrol airborne continuously and additional anti-aircraft batteries emplaced around the airfields all necessary precautions were being taken. The Unified Commander, Admiral Dennison, responded that he could not execute the order "unless you want me to undeploy."¹³ The aircraft remained in Florida.

The personality trait of ignoring the advice of experts for that of trusted advisors was potentially the most significant had the crisis escalated. As it was, military leaders in the field felt it was necessary to skirt around decisions made by civilian leaders who were seemingly out of touch with the evolving tactical situation and improperly informed about prudent military actions designed to protect troops.

A third Kennedy personality trait that emerges from the study of these events was his seeming indecisiveness at critical moments. Ironically, this trait was not only a contributing cause of the Cuban Missile Crisis, but was also a significant reason the Crisis ended as it did. Had Kennedy taken action when intelligence reports (some as early as July 1962) first indicated the movement of

offensive weapons to Cuba, the confrontation in October would not have had the implications of a nuclear exchange that it ultimately did. By the same token, had Kennedy not taken a full six days of EXCOMM deliberations to choose the quarantine as a course of action, an invasion (which was favored by the majority of the EXCOMM) would likely have resulted. Based on information now available concerning Cuban and Soviet strength on the island, thousands of American lives would certainly have been lost.

During the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy's indecisiveness resulted in a plan that was continuously changed, delayed three times, and finally approved with the provision that it could be cancelled up to twenty-four hours prior to its execution. What resulted was a plan that was doomed to failure without a large commitment of American military forces. Lack of clear guidance from the President created enough ambiguity that those charged with executing the plan were led to expect a sufficient level of American commitment.

The fourth personality trait which appears to have had a significant impact on Kennedy's decision-making was a sense of his own historical greatness and from that, a concern for his political image. As Theodore Sorensen described of Kennedy, "Far more than most politicians, he not only could objectively measure his own performance but also cared deeply about how that performance would be

measured by future historians as well as contemporary voters."¹⁴ In the same vein, Kennedy was extremely sensitive to media criticism. Considered the first television-age President, it was widely acknowledged that Kennedy was exceptionally adept at using the media to cast him in the best possible light.

This was best illustrated in another military crisis of the President's own choosing. Many Kennedy critics suggest the President intentionally suppressed negative accounts of the growing American effort in Vietnam to avoid having to make difficult political decisions at home regarding increased United States involvement. Kennedy did not want to be remembered by historians as the President who "lost Vietnam."¹⁵

It is impossible to judge to what degree Kennedy allowed the concern for his image and standing in history contribute to his decisions to use the military in the conduct of foreign policy. It is clear, however, that the political capital to be derived from the image that was depicted was certainly a motivating factor in making those decisions. His desire to appear resolute and confident, while out-maneuvering his opponents, was a common thread that was evident in each crisis. Time and again decisions were made that would result in the deployment of military units which reflected mostly political image considerations.

Much like decisions during the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam, the eventual decision to establish the quarantine during the Cuban Missile Crisis was perhaps also made because it was the most politically palatable option. To invade without warning would have irrevocably damaged Kennedy's worldwide prestige, and, as Robert Kennedy noted, invoke images of "a Pearl Harbor in reverse...it would blacken the name of the United States in the pages of history."¹⁶ To do nothing would have been politically ruinous. In another exchange with Robert Kennedy, the President agreed that had he not taken action, "I would have been impeached."¹⁷ Additionally, some historians have speculated that the crisis did not occur earlier due to political considerations. With the mid-term elections approaching, Kennedy was simply delaying a decision he did not want to make.

Arguably, the sum of the personality traits described above had the greatest impact on Kennedy's relationship with the military. Numerous examples have been provided which highlight the inevitable conflicts which Kennedy's personality and decision-making tendencies created with the Pentagon. Perhaps the most significant consequences were: (1) Kennedy's foreign policy and political objectives were never accompanied with a clear military objective; and (2) Kennedy's style took the military professionals out of the decision-making loop.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff cannot escape blame. As noted previously, they failed the President early in his Administration by not strenuously expressing their concerns about the Bay of Pigs invasion plan. The ensuing distrust between Kennedy and the JCS was not entirely misplaced. During the Cuban Missile Crisis the military took actions that, although militarily prudent, were not authorized by the President.

Nevertheless, the military was prepared when Kennedy called upon them. The military recognized the strategic implications of Cuba and had completed extensive planning for contingencies in the region. Additionally, despite their differences, the President was acutely aware of the value of a strong military, and therefore, it was Kennedy who ensured the military had the necessary tools to perform its mission.

President Kennedy was described by those closest to him as "an idealist without illusions."¹⁸ The foregoing accounts of his personality traits seem to bear this out. While recognizing the lofty ideals with which Americans viewed their place in the world, his decisions never strayed far from the political realities of how those decisions would play at home. An individual does not rise to the highest office in the land without supreme confidence in his own judgment. While all accounts suggest that Kennedy sincerely believed in the vision he so clearly articulated,

just as virtually every other person to occupy the White House, President Kennedy was first, and foremost, a politician.

Conclusion

Among the many legacies that defined the Kennedy Presidency was the realization that conventional military capabilities had a significant role to play in the Cold War world. Unlike his immediate predecessors, President Kennedy recognized that demands could be made of the Soviet Empire, and Communism could be contained, without resorting to nuclear war. The unfortunate by-product of his strategy was the eventual introduction of American combat forces into Southeast Asia. The definitive achievement of his doctrine was in keeping the United States out of a nuclear war when events, and experts of the day, pointed to the inevitability of just such a confrontation.

In his speeches and press conferences, President Kennedy very closely articulated what is the modern day, textbook definition of the role the military performs as an element of national power. In an effort to ensure the military was able to fulfill this role, Kennedy's greatest contribution to the military establishment was in rebuilding its conventional capabilities after eight years of neglect by the Eisenhower Administration. He was so enamored of the military as an instrument of power that in most instances using the military was not only the most attractive option,

but sometimes the only option Kennedy pursued. It is debatable whether it was always the correct option.

Central to understanding what provided the motivation for Kennedy to employ the military in the execution of his foreign policy strategy is an appreciation of the vision Kennedy had of America's role in the world. It was shaped almost exclusively by the Cold War and his perception of democracy's predominance over communism. This was not a novel concept for leaders of his era; however, it was central to his campaign for the Oval Office, and arguably the theme with which he continued to campaign while in the White House for what would have certainly been a run for a second term. As noted earlier, the ultimate decision to employ the military was very nearly always made with domestic politics in the forefront.

President Kennedy's personal ambitions and idealist perceptions of the world demanded a proactive strategy which had to be executed from a position of strength. A military capable of responding to any number of scenarios was the solution. Kennedy's flexible response strategy was the result.

A convincing argument can be made that his strategy succeeded in spite of, rather than because of, the actions Kennedy took during any number of crises during his Administration. Although Kennedy inherited the "Cuba problem," it was he who defined it as a crisis when it was

politically advantageous to do so. The immediate result was his undertaking of the Bay of Pigs invasion, which, in essence, produced a double-edged sword. The Bay of Pigs very likely resulted in the Cuban Missile Crisis. The results of the Bay of Pigs produced the decision-making mechanism which very likely resulted in the successful conclusion of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

It was the combination of Kennedy's decisions to use the military, and the military's performance once those decisions were made, that eventually validated his doctrine. Kennedy's personality, and the many opportune occurrences which he was a beneficiary of but had no control over, cannot be excluded as contributing to his successes.

The real John F. Kennedy was purported to be a man who was extremely competitive, thought nothing of using his brother, Robert, as his primary henchman in neutralizing his competitors, and calculated his every move to enhance his public image. How much of this characterization is fact will never be known; however, to whatever degree that it may have been, assists in explaining Kennedy's overwhelming desire to appear dominant on the world stage. The military was the means by which he chose to do so. It also provides insight into Kennedy's distrust of the military hierarchy and the reasons he so politicized military decision-making. The error of this approach was eventually manifested in the Vietnam conflict.

To say that Kennedy's management style was ineffective in the control of military employment is to trivialize his successes during the Cuban Missile Crisis. However, evidence suggests this episode was an extraordinary exception rather than the rule. Kennedy's bravado in deploying the military, or threatening its use, did not extend to the actual decisions he attempted to impose on military commanders once an operation was underway. The lesson to be drawn from this was not heeded by his successor and has hampered many presidents in their relationship with the military.

In the final irony, although President Kennedy fully understood the role of the military in the conduct of foreign affairs, he never fully grasped the purely military implications of the decisions he ultimately made. His management style and decision-making apparatus did not allow for critical input from his senior military advisors.

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